RED DIRT RESISTANCE: OKLAHOMA EDUCATORS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

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Abstract: This research explores narratives of women educators who work for change in their communities and position themselves as agents of change. Three large themes related to the educators' experiences emerged during the analysis. The first was that conservative spaces required extensive navigation as an educator agent of change. Within this theme are stories of self-silencing, navigating authoritarian boundaries, and the tension of tribal sovereignty and colonialism. The second major theme involved challenges with self-identification as an agent of change and a persistent self-evaluation of their actions in comparison to real models or stereotyped representations of activism. The third major theme, evident through thematic analysis, embodied issues of race and racism. The two white women participants demonstrated elements of embodying and resisting the educator stereotype, 'Lady Bountiful' in their efforts to promote equity in education. Meiners' (2015) critiques this Lady Bountiful as a feminized teacher stereotype whose role is to promote assimilation into white, heteronormative, Christian society. Alternatively, the two women educators of color experienced various institutional and explicit racism in their professional lives as agents of change. The intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the women's narratives play out in the larger context of the conservative political ideology in Oklahoma. This research, while calling for the expansion of theorization of teacher activism, also implicates the need to examine the perpetuation of activist stereotypes and influences of activist teacher discourses in teacher education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To pursue the topic of women educators as agents of change is to evoke a wide array of issues. The educators themselves are subject to the pervasive effects of the feminization of teaching and gendered notions of agency in education. The potential actions to change socially-unjust educational and community practices is complicated by the role of the teacher within the school or the impediments of working as a concerned community member. Additionally, the urban context, selected for this study is located within an ideologically conservative environment that makes the use of the word "activist" subject to criticism. Sensitive to the complicated nuances that inform this subject, I begin this introduction with my personal narrative. In the multiple writings trying to relay my experience as an urban educator I saw how ill-prepared I was to deal with the culturally diverse students negotiating an unfair education system.

Through multiple rewrites of this research to clarify my views, I began so see how teaching in a public school eventually dissuaded me from a belief that I could effect change outside of my school building. Through a process of reflection, I now believe that most of the impediments to my instincts towards social change were imposed through discourses I was immersed in as a teacher. In this chapter, I use my own experience as an urban educator to provide a background to the purpose of this study but also my passion for the topic. By the end of this chapter, I will explain the components of my narrative research on women educators acting as agents of social change in conservative education spaces. Influenced by poststructural

feminist approaches, I will describe how this research seeks to elicit and understand women educators' stories of negotiating conservative environments while working toward democratic educational practices.

Urban schools, including those in Oklahoma, are bogged down with issues of teacher retention, state and federal mandates, and financial struggles. These difficulties hinder schools from serving as sites for community change. Adding to that difficulty, there are conflicting beliefs on the roles of educators within schools. The obstacles to socially just teaching are so great in urban settings that researchers, like Quartz and the TEP Research Group (2003), propose extending the debate of teacher professionalism into urban education to address the specific needs of urban teachers. The deskilling of teachers, restrictive intellectual climates and school reform mandates hinder educators from engaging in socially just teaching (Nunez, Michie, & Konkol, 2015; Quartz & TEP Research Group 2003). However, media attention of LGBTQ youth issues, the Black Lives Matter and Not Your Mascot movements within schools confirm that public school curriculum should increasingly focus on creating democratic and equitable educational environments.

Hundreds of teachers in Seattle, WA wore Black Lives Matter t-shirts to acknowledge that the fight for racial equality is a school issue (Thornbeke, 2016). In Oklahoma City, the school board's decision to remove the Redskins mascot from a local high school prompted a student protest (KFOR-TV, Noland, & Kringen, 2014). Overlapping school and community interests in equity issues brought about by policies and public opinion ultimately make their way into the classroom through the lives and experiences of the students in the educational system. As the result, the educator plays a vital part in serving as a change agent within these spaces.

However, the continuing pressure of accountability measures challenge attempts at applying a social reconstruction approach to public pedagogy within schools. Stovall (2010) suggests that urban schools are contested spaces that impact intersectional groups striving for public pedagogy of equitable education. Unfortunately, as Stovall explains, the process can be marred by power

structures and a convergence of educational, social, and urban development initiatives that often prioritize differing objectives. Due to various challenges and influences, today's public school systems are more likely to be considered prison pipelines and spaces that reproduce racial, class and gender stereotypes than spaces to re-imagine dynamics of power and knowledge in school curriculum (Giroux 1981; Thomas, 2011; Thorne, 1993). Public schools are at the intersection of youth, curriculum, and national and local social movements. Despite this fertile ground, public schools are not widely considered sources of social justice or democratic education practices (Stovall, 2010). Educators within a local community must act on, in, and through these systems to create change that impacts those communities.

As a public school teacher for 11 years, I learned to be an educator in the largest urban district in the state of Oklahoma. My time at Oklahoma City Public Schools showed me the endurance of segregation based on district school mapping and the importance of acknowledging the lives of students who lived far differently from my white, middle class experience. From my experiences as an employee I have seen a revolving door of teacher retention and considerable teacher dissatisfaction. As a teacher in four different Oklahoma City schools, I was told to improve parent involvement and address an endless list of problems due to the high poverty levels and the high mobility rate of students. The act of addressing the diverse needs of my students inspired me politically and personally to create better communities outside of my classroom. Ultimately, I was never able to contribute to community change to the extent I wanted to as an educator. My awareness of educational inequalities allowed me to aid students and parents on personal level, but I was too overwhelmed with a sense of isolation to do more. Fear of isolation, lack of time and possibly weak resolve hindered me from becoming active outside of my school building.

Becoming an urban educator shaped how I understood the neighborhoods of this diverse city and its people. I saw firsthand the importance of culturally relevant curriculum championed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and Geneva Gay (2010), but not before I made appalling mistakes with my students when I failed to value their culturally constructed approaches to knowledge and education. I

struggled for three years to understand community and cultural values that differed from my own only to realize that I had become part of the system that reproduced societal expectations of marginalized children. Indeed, following in the stereotypical path of a white middle class woman aiming to "do good", I began to walk through the process of seeing how schooling had become a restrictive institution for the students - and me.

This especially painful experience early in my career served as a sharp contrast to my previous employment. Before becoming a teacher, I had been a sort of Jill of All Trades working at a community health organization that offered housing and provided occupational counseling to homeless individuals with HIV in Oklahoma City. Throughout my time working with the LGBTQ community and the facility's staff, I constantly met with individuals or attended meetings that merged the concepts of providing community services under the larger umbrella of social and political activism. There was no conceivable way of separating the caring for members of the LGBTQ community, especially to prevent infection or care for those infected with HIV, from the necessity to address the stigma of HIV and needs of the youngest members of that community. It was impossible to separate the act of caring for the needs of a client or community member from the political implications of this type of work. Meeting clients' needs meant navigating other organizations to gain access to necessary items that we did not have. Ironically, there was some tensions with church organizations that also serviced these communities due to a pervasive bias against people HIV and the LGBTQ community. This tension served as a backdrop to the work and required constant public relations efforts on behalf of the staff.

Every call about employment opportunities for clients and every connection that was made to food pantries and other health agencies came from a stance of informing and correcting misunderstandings about HIV, homelessness and the thriving LGBTQ community in Oklahoma City. My employers were visible in the community as symbolic agents that promoted an understanding of the needs and strengths of the LGBTQ community. As a staff we actively used relationships and networking to build a strong, if sometimes unnoticeable, base for financial if not always political

support. As an employee and a human, I marched in the Pride Parade and attended a gala for the very purpose of being a visible sign of change and connecting the social justice and health needs of this community to the larger Oklahoma City community. Unfortunately, I experienced tremendous culture shock when shortly thereafter I became an elementary school teacher. I quickly began to see that this type of social activism and resistance was not welcomed and not possible within the early stages of my career as I began to learn what it meant to be a "teacher".

Despite my best efforts, and no matter how much I wanted to make it about the promotion of democratic ideals, teaching in public schools, at times, forced me to perform the act of reinforcing class, race and gender roles. When parents had more money, their students were afforded more tolerance by the administration and different sets of expectations for students played out in my classroom. When students, largely African American, acted out, I was encouraged by other teachers and administrators to become more heavy-handed with behavior management techniques. When girls engaged in hyperactive behavior that mirrored hyperactive boys, I felt considerable pressure by my co-workers to control their behavior since it was out of the realm of acceptable female norms. Often, the biggest struggle in my day would be defending my students against the judgments and expectations of the other teachers in the building. I was often caught in a position requiring my students to perform at assemblies to show off their abilities to meet a Westernized notion of public achievement that didn't match the cultural values or interests of some of my students. The hidden curriculum of a successful elementary student was at odds with many of my culturally diverse students and required constant navigation.

Early in my teaching career, various professional development opportunities through my school and district reinforced for me that my employment was based on a socially constructed notion of "teacher," which assigned classroom management and pedagogical approaches to me. Through hindsight, I can clearly evoke the memory of my classroom which was designated as a model for a character building/classroom management program popular in Oklahoma. This program was often employed by schools to train teachers how to create classroom environments that promote greater

learning. That memory of my classroom, once a source of pride due to praise by administrators, is laden with racial and authoritative undertones that put me in a position to deny students' diverse cultural perspectives without reflecting on my own beliefs and behavior. Specifically, I felt that contradiction when imposing standards of behavior on my Indigenous and Hispanic students. I failed to adhere to my own sense of ethics due to an atmosphere of compliance.

Somehow, even with my past employment that celebrated activist agency in its employees, I failed to see how my role as a woman teacher sitting in professional development my school offered shaped me through the feminized hetero-normality that is required of elementary teachers. Entrenched in the discourses that shaped my early years, I had become the colonizing, virginal, white lady described by Erica Meiners (2002). Only instead of learning to be what Meiners' describes as "Lady Bountiful" in a pre-service education program, I learned it through my interactions with school staff and administrators. In addition to my discomfort in experiencing normalized expectations, I found that the act of teaching within the confines of gendered roles reinforced my obedience to authority, the status quo and a hierarchy of power. It took a long time, but by locating areas of tension I felt as a feminist working as an elementary teacher, I began to see the urban educational space I entered as a space of resistance, struggle and hope. Urban education is the space where I realized how, quite against my will, I was caught in a cultural discourse of the woman teacher. I began to realize the necessity of resistance in order to become a teacher in accordance with my ideals of democratic education.

Like every teacher, issues of parent communication, classroom engagement, and building class community were not helped by the physical distancing of myself from the community in which I taught. An urban habitué, I never lived in any of these socially and economically diverse communities. I taught, but never attended cultural or religious events in this area, and largely saw the city as a whole as only loosely representing my geopolitical identity having been raised in nearby economically depressed, largely white, town. Looking back, I can see how privileged and racist ideology taught me to fear urban areas when I was young. As the result of my childhood experiences,

my understanding of the fragmentation of my participation and inclusion into the culture of the school was incomplete. This only increased the distance I felt from my students who had been trying to reframe my ideas about where they lived and, subsequently, who they were. I think back to one of my talks with second graders about what 'ghetto' meant and about their views of their surroundings. Even among seven year olds, different streets among the same neighborhood left the children with different feelings about inclusion and security. Their views of agency and the agency that I imposed on them differed so greatly that I was unable to meaningfully hear their stories, although my memory continues to replay these incidents years later. Needless to say, my teaching and pedagogy were nowhere close to making me a conscious agent for social change.

At some point during my third year of teaching, after considering the anger of a few parents when they realized that I didn't understand the stakes for Black students in the application-based magnet high school system in Oklahoma City, I began to see myself as an outsider to a city that I had been around all my life. I was an outsider within the school system by being both an alternatively certified elementary teacher and as a woman educated in a small rural town just east of Oklahoma City. The pressure inside me compounded until I began to act against the standard expectations and the directives of my administrators. I began to create school programs, like a Literacy Night and Science Fair that targeted families who were economically disadvantaged or represented marginalized cultural groups. I was also able to work directly with the district to pull in resources and encourage our Hispanic parents, many of whom spoke little English, to connect and become comfortable in the school setting. I created a Writing Night, led by a famous local author where parents and children wrote side by side, snuggled in the warm cafeteria. From an initial project in my classroom came a unified school altruism project that culminated when the entire school Skyped with a program organizer in Tanzania from Heifer International. These were all little actions taken to unify and invite participation among families and teachers separated by race, class and economic position.

Looking back, I worked for change within the system employing the motto "it is better to ask for forgiveness than for permission". I was ultimately able to win a limited freedom for my

curriculum endeavors. Ironically, one of the women who became a participant would use that expression and cause me to question my own privilege and subsequent freedom to expect forgiveness!

In my work, I was able to connect more closely with the parents and hear their fears and hopes and began seeing the classroom as a site of democratic change. While my list of school-related activities that I attempted as a teacher is lengthy, I see now that I largely worked as self-professed "authority within the school and did so without a sense of community. Passionate and driven, I was unable to see how my work was helping the lives of students outside of the school and was confused with how much my efforts really mattered. I felt a growing sense of isolation as I was being labeled as radical by my peers for constantly questioning whether school practices and policies excluded or marginalized racial or ethnic families. I can see now that I wished I had had a community of people to share a sense of purpose and hope for change. With time to reflect, I see that my wishes have driven me to seek narratives about women teachers acting as agents of change. This study, while exploring the experiences of teachers who seek social change will allow me to follow through on connecting my own life to social change practices, but also address the complex problems associated with being an women educator change agent.

Formally, this research will explore experiences of women educators as civic agents of social change and their stories within the conservative political climate of Oklahoma. Additionally, throughout these narratives, I seek contemporary experiences of social change that add to the long tradition of women educators that engage in social equality issues since the late eighteenth century in the United States. Historically, teachers and community educators using conflict resolution or nonviolent approaches were the driving force in educational and social equalizing in the spaces they inhabit. In the fight for gender, racial, and economic equality, community and professional educators lobbied and achieved kindergartens, teacher tenure, equal pay for teachers, access to democratic education for Blacks and immigrants, and desegregation of schools (Acker, 1995; Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999; Munro, 1995). Through this research, I hope to highlight the political and discursive

space occupied by women educators who consider themselves agents of change in conservative environments. From my own experience, I believe the tension between women educators as political agents and the restraints of politically conservative spaces needs to be addressed in a way that complicates and broadens the notion of educator activism.

Problem Statement

The increasing demand for accountability of teachers' time and the ceaseless questioning of teacher professionalism and curriculum authority drove me to find relief in a graduate program in Curriculum Studies. Teaching for eleven years simultaneously brought me a sense of satisfaction from working with focused dedication, and a sense of incompleteness. This was a sensation I didn't have words for until I experienced Maxine Greene's enduring phrase "I am what I am, not yet" (Teachers College, 2001). I felt that I had had modest success at increasing cultural sensitivity and questioning school practices that marginalized students, but as often happens, my experience ran remarkably parallel to those who see their efforts as unquestionably necessary if potentially futile (Nunez, Michie, & Konkol, 2015). In fact, the personal connection I have with this topic lies not in my expansive experience in being an educator activist, but in my compliance as a public school teacher within the restrictive boundaries that limited my call for change within the walls of the school building.

I was not alone in my frustration as I began to see through my engagement with scholarship on educators seeking social change. As I survey the literature to understand more about educators as change agents, I have found explorations of personal experience as an activist and historically-based scholarship identifying women educators as change agents particularly informative. Similarly, I have found differences in accounting for experiences of teacher activism based on race. Several well-developed avenues of scholarship focus on African American women's motivations, activism that were foundational to creating social change during the Civil Rights movement (Charron & Cline, 2010; Clemmons, 2014; Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999).

This study foregrounds gender to understand the patriarchal structures integrated into women educators' lives, especially in conservative spaces. However, this work acknowledges the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and the subsequent implications in the lives of minority women educators (Crenshaw, 1991). While this work broadly focuses on the negotiations of women educator change agents in conservative environments, this work actively seeks narratives from racially and economically diverse participants, in pursuit of intersectionality in the negotiation of discourses in Oklahoma.

While there is more scholarly work on teacher activism associated with social and political movements both historically and contemporarily (Catone, 2014; Crocco, Munro, &Weiler,1999; Mirra, & Morrell, 2011; Picower, 2012b), there is much less scholarship on individual experiences of teachers seeking social change apart from activist organizations, especially in politically conservative areas. This study will focus on Oklahoma, which proves to be ideal because scholarship locates Oklahoma not only in the Bible Belt, but considers it in the running to be its figurative "buckle" (Brunn, Webster, & Archer, 2011). This work focuses on locating less noticeable examples of educator change agents as way to continue the conversation of scholars like Stovall (2010) and Picower (2010b) by providing an analysis of educator actions in conservative environments. Specifically, urban areas in a conservative state. Oklahoma City is also unique because, although it is an urban environment, there are few lobbying groups and teacher organizations working on education equality that involves race, ethnicity or gender issues.

Likewise, in Oklahoma, the term 'activism' does not always indicate the promotion of equity, democratic ideals or social justice. This is a particularly important distinction because most literature on educators as social change agents place activism at a binary to the beliefs of culturally conservative ideology. However, activism or acting as an agent of change can be done with the purpose of promoting culturally conservative values. For example, in Mason (2009) explores a reactionary educational movement in Appalachia to block the adoption of school curriculum that promoted diverse perspectives of the American experience because it detracted from mainstream

narrative that favor white, Christian, conservative discourses. Again, the category and definition of activism are fraught with contradiction and political connotation. In this study, women educator agents of change do not work to promote conservative ideals, although a few are unable to escape the trappings of the ideology entirely.

Catone (2014) and Munro (1995) argue that narratives of women educators describing themselves as social change agents are generally underrepresented in scholarship of teacher activism. In response to this gap, this study focuses on narratives of women educators as agents of change in politically conservative urban climates. These conservative spaces lack the support of larger social justice organizations in other urban areas that are generally illustrated in scholarship about teacher activism. Exploring educators' stories working in conservative educational communities to resist dominant discourses that construct our modern education environment is important for expanding the literature and provide informative strategies for all educators to engage social change.

Before continuing, it is important to explain the terminology employed in this study. While this study is closely related to educational or teacher activism, I choose to use a more general term "agent of change" for this study. While the terms activist and agent of change have overlapping meanings and indicate subjective positioning, the terms are not completely interchangeable. Activist implies working for radical political change, but in conservative environments, educators may see themselves as promoters of democratic education and resister of policies and actions that enact harmful education practices yet resist seeing themselves as activists. My experiences with educators in Oklahoma reveal that more are comfortable using the term agent of change or even social justice educators, than activists. I am more interested in specific stories of those educators who educate against the grain than if they identify strictly identify themselves as activists. As part of this research I ask participants about the term agent of change and how they relate to such terminology as part of their work. It is important to know how they use language within conservative discourse to describe their actions and experiences.

The term agent of social change, here, means that educators work for positive social change that improve the lives of individuals and communities, specifically as related to democratic and equitable education. These people, generally, consider themselves committed to social change and are called to social action (Jackson, 2011). The term agent of change refers to persons who might otherwise call themselves critical or social justice educators or even activists. The defining characteristic of an agent of change for this study is that the personal actions of educators informed by critical consciousness and that educators must move beyond thinking about social and education inequities to some form of action whether inside or outside of their classroom. Using the term agent of change is purposefully inclusive and particularly useful for examining the efforts of contemporary educators working for culturally responsive, equitable, democratic education in a conservative climate. It is also an important distinction from the works of Montaño, Lopez-Tórres, Delissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, (2002) and Picower (2012b) who define teacher activism that moves beyond social justice pedagogical approaches in the classroom. These scholars concluded that contemporary teacher activism requires political actions outside of the classroom and this expanded view should be considered when applying the term to working teachers or teaching pre-service teachers. While defining terms is important for the clarity of this research, I do not intend my definition to represent an inflexible description of educators I interview. The diverse ways that educators see themselves and define their actions demands that I remain flexible to exploring narratives that don't match a narrow, and possibly limiting, description of "agents of change".

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research, located in a conservative urban setting, is to explore the experiences of women educators working as agents of social change through their own stories. This work, while seeking to identify and explore the stories of women educator change agents in conservative urban areas, makes meaning from specific positions of what it means to be an educator or agent of social change. Given the neoliberal and authoritarian influences on the current education system and teacher practices, as Giroux (2013) indicates, I am interested in gathering stories that

indicate contemporary experiences and circumstances of educators' acting as agents of change. This research will add to a scholarly understanding of the discourses that construct educators' lived experience and practice. This inquiry expands the notion of what constitutes an educator by exploring of modern examples of educator activism. This research places itself within a historical continuum that honors and extends the exploration of work in the tradition of educators like Clara Luper, who as a teacher in Oklahoma City Public Schools helped end segregation in Oklahoma City restaurants by engaging and enabling her students to use nonviolent methods to pursue racial equality (Luper, 1979).

Research Questions

The questions that guide this work are as follows:

1. What are women educators' stories about negotiating conservative spaces as agents of change?

2. What does it mean, to them, to be an agent of change in their communities and schools located in socially and politically conservative spaces?

Theoretical Framework

At first approach, this work was rooted in understanding my own experience and self-discovery as an unwilling participant in a banking-style education system (Freire, 1970). The banking-style school reform policy mandates created tension with my deeper belief that I should be the teacher Giroux and McLaren (1986) described. They suggest that teachers should be viewed as someone who "treat[s] students as critical agents, question how knowledge is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue and make knowledge meaningful, critical and ultimately emancipatory" (p. 303). Indeed, modern conceptions of educational activism are grounded in theorized aims of emancipation that are linked to notions of a democratic, equitable education. Despite previously conceptualizing my past teaching experiences within a critical frame, I am unable to reconcile "boundaries" of theoretical frameworks in a traditional sense to explore the experiences of the women educator activists in this study. The more I focused on the importance of discourses and resistance to those discourses the more apparent critical theory's limitations were when applied to this study. I

ultimately abandoned a singular critical approach to my educational practice and scholarship due to the restrictive binary thinking that failed to acknowledge the impact of discourses on subject positions that people utilize when approaching the world, even as agents of change or researchers on behalf of agents of change (Ellsworth, 1989). The realities of teaching in public school and higher education led me to believe that I cannot change my students' views of reality through empowerment as much as I could attempt to disrupt discourses that pervade our lives. Also complicating this work is my desire to situate not only the context of the educator within society, but how they negotiate and resist discourses in a relational way as they seek social change. My approach therefore, will apply poststructural feminist theory, which is a combination of feminist and poststructural approaches. Feminist and poststructural theories emphasizes subjectivity, relationality, and expression of power matrices making it especially useful in this study.

Ultimately, my theoretical approach emerged as the combination of poststructural tenets with a feminist lens. Using a poststructural feminist approach, I follow Petra Hendry's (2011) assumption that "…women's subjectivity and modes of self-representation are unmapped" in the larger context of curriculum and history of education and require a poststructural turn in interpretation (p. xi). Hendry (2011, 1996) complicates women teachers and women educators' stories, and the entire history of curriculum, through a poststructural lens. With this understanding, I approach this work of women educators' stories in the poststructuralist tradition of relationality and shifting identities. Grounding my thinking in poststructural feminism allows me to begin approaching the larger curriculum issues related to women educators by situating them historically, locating it in social structures and within an autobiographical context (Hendry, 2011; Pinar, 2012; Pinar et al, 2004; Slattery, 2013). Focusing on historical contexts, relationality, and discursively-created women educator-subjects, I can accomplish the poststructural feminist goals of disrupting notions of power and gender that set all subject actions as inherently political and see resistance to power as dangerous (St. Pierre, 2000).

Power relationships within educational systems that participants move through, as described by Foucault (1975), will enable viewing of the sites and positionality of the participants located in the

conservative political atmosphere of Oklahoma. Moving inward from a macro perspective of situated subjectiveness to the more micro perspective of personal experience, I will examine how different positioning, such as the recognition of Otherness through self, allows theoretical framing of participant stories (Butler, 2015). Subjectivity, as used here, defies the notion of a "unified fixed self that has a stable and essential core" (Jackson, 2001, p. 386). Instead, my poststructural feminist approach to subjectivity better matches Weedon's (1997) view that subjectivity is "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 22). According to St. Pierre (2000), the poststructural stance on a woman educator subject lies within their ability to "decode and recode its identity within discursive formations and cultural practices" (p. 504) that go beyond institutional constraints. Power matrices or structures, understood in this manner, can help me understand participants' stories not from an either/or position, but from a more fluid, multiple, contradictory, ever-shifting lens that complicates narratives of agency and resistance. Feminists, according to Weedon (1997), are particularly amiable to utilizing Foucault's (1975) focus on patriarchal power structures and utilize his emphasis on history. Stories of women educators are particularly useful from a poststructural perspective, because stories are inherently messy, complicated and reflective of negotiations of multiple discourses.

Within the borders of theoretical framing, I am motivated to use poststructural feminism for ethical reasons to explore the personal stories of participants. Disrupting critical binary notions of identity or agency of women educators is a necessary step to dislodging stereotyped notions of educators, in a heavily gendered profession, who resist dominant discourses of gender and activism. Theoretical frameworks informing research design must acknowledge previous scholarship on educator activism (i.e. critical work on educator resistance), but also must move through the framing of narrative methodology and engage with the data (stories) in a more meaningful, albeit a more complicated and messy way. Such is the work of Debbie Sonu (2009) who uses poststructural approaches in education to examine social justice practices. In her view, "poststructuralists, then,

reject neutrality through the interruption of authenticity, definitions, and boundaries, and generally work with a commitment to interpretation and experience as at the core of social and psychic examination" (Sonu, 2009, p.32).

The joining of feminism and poststructuralism is crucial to the interpretation of stories of women educators engaged in social change work that is by definition fluid, unfinished and complex. Delving into subjectivity is inextricably complex, noted by Judith Butler (2015) in her query:

> Could it be that the narrative dimension of the theory of subject formation is impossible, yet necessary, inevitably belated, especially when the task is to discern how the subject is initially animated by what affects it and how these transitive processes are reiterated in the animated life that follows? If we want to talk about these matters, we have to agree to occupy an impossible position, one that, perhaps, repeats the impossibility of the condition we seek to describe. (p. 4)

Butler, here, notes the impossibility combined with the necessity of theorizing subject formation. The complexity of examining personal experience within a conservative space led me to move away from identifying the fixed core identity of a subject, instead, examining the layers of subjectivity and consequent negotiations of women educators (Jackson, 2001). Even in the process of questioning their experiences, I will have disrupted their ongoing negotiations of their intersectional experiences. If I demand a clean and uncomplicated theory of subject formation I ignore tenets of poststructural feminism that include disrupting notions of power and challenging identity categories (Jackson, 2001, St. Pierre, 2000). The fluidity of the subject negotiation, which is in process before the gaze of researcher, is celebrated by exploring stories that move within and beyond discursively created boundaries.

Methodology

At the core of this qualitative study is the gathering of narratives from women educators in and associated with an urban school in Oklahoma. Foundationally, this work avoids seeking narratives to demonstrate a 'truth' found or a picture of a participant's experience based in 'reality'.

The narratives instead become an impression of an experience, a representation, as Van Maanen (2011) calls it. Narrative Inquiry, done with a poststructural feminist framework requires intense care and scrutiny to avoid representing participants' stories as one core, fixed, identity (Blumenreich, 2004). This work seeks to shift through participant stories that are laden with complex notions of subjectivity and the discourses that shape participants' actions. Likewise, this scholarship acknowledges its ethical responsibility to handle the complex interweaving issues of class, race, culture, and gender that come up for educator activists in urban schools, and thus requires extreme care in understanding the context of data collection and interpretation.

A narrative inquiry approach is the most suitable and cohesive methodology for the purpose of exploring how women educators see themselves as promoting some form of social change within the larger educational community. Exploring storied perceptions and a sense of agency requires an approach that focuses on participant stories but also acknowledges that these stories are unique within the research setting as a construction of the research process (Lather & Smithies, 1997). However, narrative approaches provide the methodological flexibility to layer complex experiences due to the associated data collection methods of multiple progressive interviewing (Lather & Smithies, 1997, Riessman, 2008). Petra Munro Hendry (2010) states that all research is narrative, explaining that research inquiries are essentially narrative since all research seeks to make meaning.

As a methodology, narrative is particularly useful in the context of understanding women educator experiences because, as Grumet (1988) explains "to tell a story is to impose form on experience" (p. 87). This imposition may have consequences for the subject in their ongoing negotiations of discourses, but still provides a meaningful platform to view the complex negotiations of participant actions in conservative spaces. Due to its flexibility, narrative inquiry as a research methodology has been growing in popularity in recent years (Clandidin & Connelly, 1990; Hendry, 2010). The narrative approach to data collection is important due to the relationship between the participant and the researcher as well as a research goal of understanding participant experience

(Chase, 2011; Kramp, 2004). Flexibility and the relationality of this this research approach makes it especially relevant to working with women educator stories.

This work builds on past scholarship, furthering the tradition of privileging teacher stories within education research. Utilizing narrative approaches acknowledges and honors the difficult and complex experiences of educators in an urban area of Oklahoma by centralizing participants' experiences over the researcher's views of their experience. My use of narrative as a methodology focuses on identifying oppressive and resistant discourses (Chase, 2011). Narrative inquiry is a natural fit for my relational approach to conceptualizing the researcher participant relationship, in addition to being a personal approach I use to make sense of my own experiences.

Researcher Subjectivity

As an elementary teacher I have held multiple teaching positions and experiences from being a grade level teacher to a reading and "gifted and talented" instructor. The majority of my eleven years of experience comes from my time in urban environments where I was employed after becoming alternatively certified to teach directly after working as an occupational rehabilitation specialist for homeless people infected with HIV at a community health center. With a quick change in career direction, I embarked on a path to immerse myself in pedagogical challenges and later pursued the National Board Certification to learn from and develop connections with the top educators in my local community and across the state. I worked tirelessly to become a well-respected educator and to establish connections and roots within the teaching community. I had the privilege during these years of growth to challenge my authoritarian mentality to become vulnerable as a white teacher in an urban setting, answering a similar call from bell hooks (1994) to seek self-actualization.

In my work with participants, I must be mindful of my own experience and struggle to explore the borders of educational possibility, especially for educators. My own narrative has the chance of grafting my experience onto the narrative of other educators. As a poststructural feminist researcher, my resistance to gendered discourses in education, especially elementary education, must be acknowledged but not centralized when encountering the narratives of other educators. As a strong

and sometime vocal opponent to school policies that further disparage students, my own voice must be identified but not overwhelm the narratives. In this mindset, I remember that words like "activism" and "resistance" are just as easily seen as promoting a particular political ideology as are they are meant to inspire or empower in marginalized spaces. Conservative climates, which serve as the context of this research, carry with them unspoken rules for the expression of resistance from women educators. All teachers' actions are political, but within a conservative political space, women's stories must be gathered with care.

Women's stories in this study may not resonate with social justice educators elsewhere in the country. Their stories may seem less dynamic or overtly political than the stories of educator activism portrayed in contemporary scholarship. However, the resistance of these women must not be overlooked or dismissed by any voice who decries that anything less than loud public protests or personal notoriety as necessary for membership into the activist category. At the same time that some definitions of educator activism can be exclusionary, sometimes, everyday actions of women educators are overlooked. While traditions of women educator change agents can point to the public life of Jane Addams or Ida B. Wells as examples of public intellectuals, there are those who toil for democratic education within obscurity.

As the result of the partnerships I made with parents and other teachers, it was easy to become passionate and inspired by my fellow citizens who demand and push the boundaries of working democracy, especially in education. My love of the people I met working there has only grown in the light of my experiences in higher education and deep self-reflection. All educators deserve the good will and respect due to the education field, especially by those engaged in educational research. However, those educational change agents who toil in spaces where hope must be safeguarded are worthy of special praise. It is in that respect that I formed my concept of an educational activist and the personal perspective within which I proceed.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it addresses a gap in the research on teachers as activists or change agents, especially in a highly charged, politically polarized climate that we find ourselves in since the 2016 presidential election. Much scholarship conceptualizes educator change agents within the roles and work of classroom teachers. The value of expanding the concept of educator acknowledges and examines activism and resistance in a way that mirrors the experience of teachers, like myself. Educator resistance of authoritarian dictates within education must move beyond closed doors, as Grumet (1988) explored, and into communities. The notion of an educator must be supple to respond to the complex interactions, interdependencies, and relationality that is inherent in democratic education approaches.

Specifically, this study is significant because research on teacher activism within schools is largely done in the context of large urban cities that have resources and political support for this type of work (Catone, 2014; Sonu 2009). Locating this research within a conservative political climate with fewer resources, in the form of parent organizations and lobby groups with democratic objectives, adds to scholarship already available on educator activism.

Democratic education can be a nebulous concept, but recent scholarship demonstrates that all social change is accomplished through a diminished sense of individualism and focus on service to the collective population (Thayer-Bacon, 2004; Wang 2013). The goal of democratic education is seen in the stories of diverse women educators that centralize the importance of social action in their lives, effectively altering the dialogue and action in public education. In terms of practical application of this research, honoring stories of women educator agents of change provides evidence of the struggles presently undertaken. This acknowledgement links those pre-service teachers with reconceptualist notions of curriculum to the stories of women that have moved beyond the discursive constraints of being a teacher.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review gives an overview of scholarship related to women educator agents of change. The breadth of this subject requires an expansive look at gender in education, the political environment of Oklahoma, and traditions and contemporary issues facing women educators. Beginning with an overview of scholarship on gendered notions of educators, I will outline the common experiences of women educator change agents. I will specifically critique the colonizing, white, feminine, "Lady Bountiful" teacher that Meiners (2002) describes as an educational legacy that must be discarded. In the early 1800s this legacy began through the recruitment of white women into teaching, because "they were (constructed as) naturally more suited to childcare, their minds were less likely to be occupied by worldly issues (economics, politics, science, etc.), and because they were in possession of purer morals" (Meiners, 2002, p. 88). A former Lady Bountiful myself, I deconstruct the essentialized notion of women educators in this work. This deconstruction is necessary to expose gendered notions of education as the context for the actions of women educator change agents.

Under this unifying experience of gender, I will explore the unique context of women educators in politically conservative areas. Specifically, I will describe Oklahoma as a politically conservative state that situates educators and activists in tension between social and political values. The educational context of Oklahoma is further explored with the introduction of several

Oklahoma educators that have operated as change agents within this specific conservative ideology. I chose Oklahoma as the conservative location, despite many other available choices in other Southern states, like Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Oklahoma was a natural choice due to my long family history of living within Indian Territory, long before statehood. I essentially grew up Okie, as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (1998) describes it. Okies, the nickname for Oklahoma natives, are located in a colonized space that is marked by Indian removal and relocation to the territory, followed by encroachment and attempted eradication of the tribal life within its shifting boarders. Despite our complicated history, Oklahoma as a state, ironically, has moved from "Red" in reference to residents' ties to the communist party to "red" in reference to the conservative ideological stronghold pervading the state (Dunbar, 1998, p.229). She notes that even the ideological hope of class or racial equality brought by the socialist movement in Oklahoma died after violence broke out between rebel small tenant farmers and larger more powerful landowners since the Green Corn Rebellion. Violent responses to radical socialist protests and proposed political change is often unknown outside of scholarly circles, leaving outsiders to the political history of Oklahoma blind to the irony of conservative strongholds that currently exist. To the outsider, Oklahoma's politics, weather, and soil can seem barren of change or hope due to a revisionist history favoring the status quo. This red dirt, cracked and barren, looks desperate to those outsiders who do not realize that the sweltering heats of August hide the bounty of the spring during the rain.

After setting the gendered and political context for this study, I overview traditions of educator agents of change from the late 1800s to the Civil Rights Era up to and including insights into themes that persist today. Fervent work in social justice scholarship has also informed the progression and consistency of four traditions of action and experience of educators. The first two traditions include the deconstruction of the definition of 'teacher' regardless of time period and the pedagogical stance of education as a political act. More personal in nature, the last two

traditions explore how women educators negotiate a reprieve from the authority of their roles and enact the public intellectual as agents of change.

While the scholarship of women in education history clearly denotes paths for creating social change, there are large gaps in scholarship of women educator change agents from the 1970s to today. While this work cannot do justice to the complexity of education history of this time, it is important to ground the narratives in this research within an understanding of modern day tensions. Finally, I utilize recent scholarly exploration of educators pursuing social justice action to emphasize how the field of educator activism research pursues contemporary understanding of educators acting as agents of change.

Gender in Education

As a teacher I felt like I was being told that women teach school; they do not, based on their own expertise and professional judgment, educate children and communities. According to this view, teachers, as agents of the school, are unable to assume the role of expert in their own classrooms. Instead teachers are expected to perpetuate the notion of social democracy that is best suited to those in positions of power. In conservative environments resisting this notion of teaching is particularly challenging to women. The women educators who promote democratic education and change exist in a juxtaposition of various educational identities.

Women educators are subject to perpetuated gendered stereotypes and essentialized notions of identity. The complicated subjectivity of women educators makes the researching of women's experiences difficult, because as Valerie Walkerdine (1990) points out being a woman teacher is ultimately "an impossible fiction" (p. 19). Traditionally, all women who choose to call themselves educators must grapple with the implications of feminized notions of teaching which include expectations of nurturing and second mothering.

There is no doubt that teaching is a feminized profession (Drudy, 2008; Galman, 2012; Goldstein, 2014; Meiners, 2002). Despite the fact that education is largely dominated by women,

it continues to have an unequal claim to the professional status of other careers dominated by males (Acker, 1995; Galman & Mallozzi, 2012). Wu (2011) states, "Teaching young children in the public domain has been denied equal pay & social status comparable to other professionals because the job is viewed as an expression of a woman's natural maternal instinct" (p. 35-36). The perpetuation of gendered norms that pervade the role of the educator are complex and situated within social expectations as well as an individual's sense of identity. Like the white and colonizing Lady Bountiful image painted by Meiners' (2002), I may have some outward resemblances to this stereotype, but those similarities only go skin deep. As a Choctaw citizen and a vocal public intellectual in my personal and scholarly work, I feel like I have never fit the mold of a typical elementary school teacher. I am generally more audacious in speaking my mind to authority than my colleagues and nurture students by engaging them intellectually rather than with more conventional physical nurturing styles common with elementary teachers. However, more often than not, people I first meet identified me as a teacher before I explain my long history with education. After over 11 years, my tone and the lilt of my voice became hyper-feminized and matched the way other teachers in my building spoke – thereby altering my behavior and reinforcing, at least outwardly, the stereotype of female elementary teachers.

The role of the female teacher

There has been a long precedent of substitute motherhood which impacts the mother-nurturer identity of the woman-teacher. Historically, middle-class Victorian women hired working class women to care for their children (Sabbe & Aelterman 2007; Tamboukou, 2000). The working class women, driven by a need of money, cared for other people's children at a sacrifice to their own. While these working class women were not teachers, the act of shifting maternal responsibilities to other women set the stage for the pressure on teachers to act as a second mother. This pressure would continue throughout the decades, establishing a tendency that Jane Miller identified as "…the teacher was not only an idealized mother, a mother designed to

make up for some pretty serious shortcomings of most real mothers" (as cited in Tamboukou, 2000, p. 467). My personal experience shows this to still be true.

Generally, people believe women are biologically predisposed to nurture students and women pursue teaching as a "calling" or to satisfy a need for personal fulfillment related to children (Galman, 2012; Goldstein, 2014; Meiners, 2002; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007). According to Galman (2012), teachers are often examined on whether they have the "right reasons" for being in education, especially elementary education, while lacking compensation for a job that is "the lowest paid, lowest status professionals in most Western industrialized nations" (p. 41). Goldstein explains how Catherine Beecher, from the 1820's onward, perpetuated this notion of the mother-teacher in the pursuit of a career path for intellectually frustrated middle class white women. Today, this notion still exists as research reveals some female teachers identified with a phenomenon called "burden of care" (Acker, 1995, p. 123). Autobiographical texts, like those of Madeline Grumet (1988) reveal that care and nurturing of students is an important factor in conceptualizing the role of a female teacher and becomes part of a negotiated teacher-identity. Grumet (1988) also notes that the feminization for women teachers can also serve as a site of resistance, but that the mother/teacher relationship for the educator is inescapable. Today this relevance is particularly striking as the notion of mothering and care complicate an already difficult career for people who do not fit racial, gender, or other personality characteristics perpetuated as stereotypes in the field which is largely comprised of white women (National Center for Education Statistics).

Much of the gender and education research cited earlier indicates the oppressive nature of the feminized role of teacher in education. It is also important to note that there was a time when poor and minority women were able to become professional educators allowing them to further engage in the resistance to the status quo (Acker, 1995; Galman, 2012; Tamboukou, 2000). With rise of the mothering discourse in education, unmarried female teachers were able to have a place to pursue (limited) intellectual activities with justification (Galman, 2012). A career in education

for a Black woman in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was tied to service to the community and the promotion of equality. Educators were asked to sacrifice additional time and labor to campaign for white citizens and politicians for better schools and curriculum (Fultz, 1995). Complicating the deconstruction of the feminine educator is the knowledge that a teaching career served as leverage for some women to live their lives as agents of change (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler (1999).

Often teachers refer to treating students as their personal children with the responsibility to raise them, increasing the tangle of expectations of a career that has social, personal and political implications. Research indicates this is especially true for some minority teachers in the Civil Rights era and beyond who saw teaching as a way to help their own people escape the suffering of especially devastating segregation policies (Charron & Cline, 2010; Clemons, 2014; Jackson, 2011; Ramsey, 2012). Along these lines, scholarship by Casey (1993) demonstrates how an educator's situated position complicates agency, subjectivity and the desire to be a change agent. In her work, Casey noted the self-awareness of the women she interviewed who identified as a black teacher/mother as they worked for the benefit of their community. One interviewee acknowledged that "[B]eing a black teacher means "raising the race", accepting personal responsibility for the well-being of one's people, and, especially for the education of all black children (Casey, 1993, p. 152). This is an important distinction from the Lady Bountiful trope employed in my teaching experience. The idea of "raising a race" seems vastly different than promoting assimilation for good citizenship.

Further changes in modern day teaching has extended beyond improving racial or class well-being to becoming a physical protector of students, especially since schools are targets for violence and mass shootings. As a teacher in the wake of the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting, I felt the implied understanding of parents who assume that I would readily die to protect the students in my class. Despite the ethical questions of a profession that requires the

ultimate self-sacrifice, the school house becomes more polarized by gender binaries with growing police and gun presence in schools.

I introduce the gendered notion of education to consider what is at stake for the field of education when educators act for social change. Women educators navigate the intersections of what discourses claim they should be and what their duty is to their students, schools and communities. These women must explore not just their own sense of self but their sense of agency in a culture that discourages such actions. The intersectionality of gender and race for educators are central to negotiating power, authority, and a sense of who they are in their daily lives. It is important for this work to acknowledge that women must negotiate all of the essentialized notions of being an educator. While doing so, this study avoids promoting educator change agents as white teacher heroines thereby disrupting normalized views of women educators. More work is needed to address and deconstruct the evasive nature of Lady Bountiful that exists in our teacher education and research practices (Meiners, 2002).

Consequences of a feminized profession

The consequences of gendered notions of teachers and the feminization of the profession of teaching are simultaneous themes that run throughout this research. Due to the overwhelming sexism that proliferates the feminized stereotypes of teachers, there is an undeniable impact on the women educators seeking to change their schools and communities (Grumet, 1981). There are three basic consequences of the feminization of the field that I will discuss in this section. One is the professional consequences of working within a feminized field. The second consequence of working as an educator in a feminized field is the lack of diversity in authority positions that could facilitate social justice initiatives. The third consequence is that the female subject is negotiating a paradox of identity (Tamboukou, 2000). Some of this paradox is tended by the panoptic regulation of stereotypes in education, which means that women agents of change must negotiate through a complicated tangle of gendered norms and expectations as well as the internal or external pressures to create equitable spaces for their students (Bushnell, 2003).

The profession of teaching is often referred to as a 'semi-profession' similar to nursing (Drudy 2008). Drudy (2008) questions whether teaching can even be called a profession. Other professions, she states, such as doctors or business professionals are "…more in control of their time, duties and income than are established teachers" (p. 315). This semi-professional status is unmatched in other careers requiring the same amount of higher education. Besides, working in a highly audited and regulated field, women educators are consistently underpaid due to the justification of women's innate and biological predisposition to work with young children. Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) refer to this as a stereotype of women which become teachers to fulfill personal notions of care for young children as an altruistic endeavor rather than for monetary or intellectual gain. If the field accepts the teacher for having the proper motives in teaching, future or established women educators must decide if the field is even compatible to a life that includes meeting basic standards of economic gain. It is inevitably hard for women educators to fight for democratic education if the basic dignity and wage expected in a white collar job is denied them.

The second major consequence directly related to the feminization of teaching is the accessibility of jobs in school administration for women educators. It is false to assume that a workforce that features a largely female majority leads to ample opportunities to advance within that workforce. In fact, Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) refer to the effect of the few males in the profession rising higher and faster into administrative positions than their female counterparts as the 'glass elevator' (p.529). Oklahoma Watch, a non-profit, investigative journalism website, recently cited that while eight in ten public school teachers in Oklahoma are female, only two out of ten state superintendents are female (Palmer, 2016). The news website ultimately concluded that while there have been gains in middle level administrative positions (the ratio of men to women principals is roughly equal), women are still experiencing a glass ceiling in education. Even the ratio of men to women principals is stunning. With males accounting for only about twenty percent of the workforce, it seems a disproportionate number of them are located in administrative positions. This disparity of influence indicates a potential struggle for women

educators hoping to create lasting democratic change. While continually marginalized within the schools and communities, women educators must pursue their goals with limited access to positions of authority.

While the connections between social, political and economic factors that determine the availability of administrator jobs to women is complex, I have personal experience with the phenomenon of male teachers being singled out for future leadership positions. As a fourth year teacher, I welcomed a male student-teacher into our grade level team. His female mentor teacher, as well as the male principal, began speaking to him about how long it would be before he could rise to the level of principal and claimed him to be principal material. As a fourth year teacher, I was perplexed that these declarations were made without any substantial evidence. It wasn't until my tenth year of teaching that I was encouraged by a different principal to pursue an assistant principal position.

The ultimate consequence of the feminization of teaching on the actions of women educators apparent in the paradoxes that occur within the professional teacher identity. Tamboukou (2000) indicates the paradox of women teachers comes, in part, from the constant struggle between dichotomous notions of the teaching identity. At conflict is the public and private lives of women educators as they simultaneous perform and resist the expectations of their jobs. While they negotiate their own fluid and changing subjectivity within the paradoxical educational space, some still choose to resist the panoptic gaze of the schoolhouse (Bushnell, 2003).

Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) and Meiners (2002) describe the middle class, white, woman teacher stereotype that demands teachers have the 'right reasons' for becoming teachers. These reasons include saving children and acting out of a natural and undeniable instinct to nurture that is rooted in their own altruism. This feminized notion of women educators inherently complicates this research. By focusing on women educators who promote social change, it may seem that this work reproduces the notions of this altruistic stereotype. However complicated and

paradoxical the identity of women educators may be, the act of producing social change is framed, in this research, as the ultimate act of resistance to social and systemic powers that marginalize women educators and the work of public democratic education.

Oklahoma: Fertile soil for social change

This section briefly explores the conservative ideology of Oklahoma as well as the connection of women agents of change from the civil rights movement to today illustrating the legacy of educator action within Oklahoma. Oklahoma has long been considered a part of the Bible Belt that stretches throughout the Southern and Midwestern parts of the United States. Politically conservative, the Bible belt ultimately describes geographic regions of Protestant fundamentalism, who maintain "conservative views on social issues such as school prayer, evolution, alcohol availability, and gay rights" (Brunn, Webster & Archer, 2011, p. 519). Furthermore, Oklahoma's historic interest in the oil and natural gas industry contributes to the influence of state and federal legislators who decry climate change and create national headlines throwing snowballs to debunk scientific inquiry. Science education researchers have noted the considerable impact of anti-science attitudes on the creation of state science education standards and the dissemination of information related to climate change (Colstone & Ivey, 2015).

Poverty, LGBTQ, and racial issues are easily identifiable in Oklahoma (Dunbar Ortiz, 1998; Mason, 2015). Likewise, issues of affirmative action are highly controversial influencing the negotiation of enrollment by race in higher education as late as the 1990's (Wu, 1999). In, Tulsa, Oklahoma reconciliation to improve race relations was attempted in 2009 with the construction of the Reconciliation Park to commemorate the devastating Tulsa Race Riots. Needless to say, even after the park opened, race relations remain tense. On a recent tour of Reconciliation Park, the guide explained how several public school teachers bring students to the park where the slaughter of Black citizens of Greenwood in 1921 is symbolized in meticulous gardens and powerful sculptures. These teachers, according to the guide, explain to their students how this is a selective and inflammatory version of history that is ultimately untrue (D. Dickens,

personal communication, December 14, 2016) This is by no means a universal experience, but there is a lived tension in the public schools of Oklahoma that structure the daily lives of teachers and the curriculum presented to students.

The overwhelming public support of political conservativism is a relatively new phenomenon in Oklahoma. According to Howard (2014), Oklahoma is one of the few states that had no counties with a majority win for President Obama in the 2012 presidential elections, which is interesting given that there are more registered Democrats than registered Republican's in the state. While formally a breeding ground for socialism, conservative political ideology constructs the landscape of modern Oklahoma politics. Howard (2014) points out that conservativism can define itself in relation to the opposite of whatever they consider to be the progressive binary opposition that promotes teaching homosexuality and white guilt in school curriculum (p. 83). Howard (2014) found his participants saw education as a battle ground to protect White Christian values and compared Progressives with Adolf Hitler and their own actions to be of those who tried to prevent the Nazi rise to power.

Oklahoma's conservative history is complicated and tied to colonial mindsets and a socialist past rooted in the economic hardships of the Great Depression (Dunbar-Ortiz, 1998). Despite a uniquely Oklahoman political perspective, the overall political ideology of the state was irreparably changed by reactions to Oklahoma City bombing and the 9/11 attack. King and Catlett-King (2007), through extensive research, concluded that in 2001 the viable labor movement in Oklahoma ultimately lost a tight race to a Right to Work referendum, due to a public patriotic response to the chaos of 9/11. Public patriotism, in their study, was painted by government officials as voting to preserve individual freedom from leftish ideology, such as labor organizations. Their conclusion was that a pivotal turn had taken place in a state where pro labor movements historically had a strong chance of promoting worker rights. Ultimately, Oklahoma's red leanings became embedded in within the political environment, causing conservativism to be the status quo. Furthermore, Mason (2015) posits that coinciding with post 9/11 mentality Sally

Kerns, a former state legislator, claimed herself oppressed as a white Christian woman. Her rhetoric is based in New Right politics in Oklahoma that relies on a revisionist version of history that erases racism and imperialism and identifies secular humanism as an anti-Christian enemy. The New Right's focus on rejecting civil rights or feminist movements as a focus replacing the Old Right's belief that "considered free market capitalism the foundation of national vitality" (Mason, 2009, p. 194)

Oklahomans are largely unaware of the conflicting history of socialist, republican, and southern democratic values that shape politics as we know them today. Oklahoma's part in the civil rights movement is also largely invisible from state discourses. For example, Oklahoma City was the site of the first sit-ins to end segregation among eating establishments in the nation (Luper, 1979). It seems unlikely that Oklahoma would be a place primed for change, but in places of extreme ideological tension, there is as much opportunity for peaceful change as there is violent opposition. Clara Luper was at the heart of the civil rights movement in Oklahoma, but she was far from being an isolated educator. The legacy of women educator agents of change from the heart of Oklahoma persists today. The traditions of women educators creating social change, mentioned in the following sections, are indicative of the actions of women educators in Oklahoma as well as rest of the United States. The following section will depart from the Oklahoma specific context of this research to examine four overarching traditions of educators acting for social change.

Educator Traditions in Social Change

Women educators' impact on school environments and society, as Petra Hendry (2011) points out, can be traced back, at least in Western Civilization, to the works of Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, during the Middle Ages. According to Hendry, throughout history women have altered the conception of what is knowledge and how it is produced based on an understanding that women's experiences and bodies are sites of knowing. Like many women of history, the majority of women educators have gone unnoticed, yet their works have altered the

course of the societies they occupy. At the crest of every social upheaval lies the efforts of women educators to ameliorate the effects of war and struggles for equality. Women educators are unlikely to be recorded, let alone celebrated, in historical accounts for their contributions in developing equitable societies through education. This marginalization of women educators is perpetuated to maintain education as a "semi-profession" that is ultimately for the purpose of promoting social and gendered norms and meeting the needs of a patriarchal society (Meiners, 2002).

While shifting through a sizable portion of scholarship that references women in education from the late eighteen hundreds to today, four large traditions of women educators emerged. These four traditions are encompass larger understandings of women as social change agents in the field of education.

Tradition One: Educators, not teachers.

> But we knew if we worked outside the system, we would not be recognized as educators, because an educator by definition was somebody inside the schooling system. Nevertheless, we decided we'd work outside the system and be completely free to do what we thought was the right thing to do in terms of the goals that we set for ourselves and the people we were working for. (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 200)

Horton and Freire and their many colleagues redefined the notion of educator. Both pushed the boundary of who can teach, learn and what curriculum could entail. Due to their tireless work towards social and educational equality, educators are no longer considered solely K-12 or Higher education instructors. Educator is an identity category that moves beyond professional employment to encompass people who devote themselves to the objectives of democratic education, namely critical engagement with cultural and political inequities in a variety of different spaces. Educators' actions maneuver them through formal educational spaces and the community with seamlessly. There is a long history of women who work in public schools as well as community centers, churches, women's groups, non-profit groups and many

others. There are a variety of reasons women may or may not have worked directly in education. Jane Addams did not want to work as a public school teacher, preferring instead to address systemic social problems that impacted public education (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1990). Others were hindered by their marital status, which precluded them from teaching (Goldstein, 2014). Black women were often not recommended for teaching jobs by white superintendents who refused to learn about the community (Fultz, 1995). Regardless of their own history, from Jane Addams' Hull House to the classroom of Clara Luper to the community education center, Highlander, where Septima Clark lead classes, women educators have occupied a multitude of professional spaces.

Likewise, Oakes & Lipton (2003) and Hendry (2011) list numerous professionals and academics who, in various capacities, engage in educational activism expanding the notion of who is considered working for democratic ideals in overlapping civic and educational spaces. In *Pedagogies of Resistance,* Munro (1999) describes the universality of democratic efforts by juxtaposing how Ida B. Wells worked as a public teacher and an educator in the community, while Jane Addams served to aid immigrants with educational goals towards social equity. Even if their actions cost them a teaching position, women educators continue to pursue social change. Such is the example of Septima Clark, who organized and ran programs for the Highlander Folk School, after being fired for refusing to give up her membership to the NAACP (Charron & Cline, 2010).

In redefining what it means to be an educator we must remember that the role of being public school teachers does not preclude any role as a community leader or vice versa. The lack of a clear educator identity is due to the complex, racial and gendered notions of teachers. Historically women educators and their experiences have been excluded as a site of knowledge construction (Grumet, 1988; Hendry, 2011). It is likely that this is why there is limited scholarship that pursues women educator narratives as change agents. Petra Munro Hendry (1995, 2011) points out that whether we speak of women mystics reimagining the female body as

a site of spiritual connection and knowledge (rather than sin) or the women educators of the progressive era demanding universal kindergarten, women educators have had a long history of knowledge creation and responding to the needs of the communities they occupied. From the earliest times of our nation's history the social needs of the community dictated the work that women engaged in, which ultimately changed the nature of education (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999).

While, in this work, I have expanded the notion of educator to include professional teachers and engaged members of local communities, it is necessary to also expand the notion of educational spaces. Educational spaces must include the community en masse and consider the members of such a community as potential educators. Deconstructing boundaries between formal schooling spaces and the educational possibilities of public areas is important to the work of past and present women educators. Likewise, bell hooks (2003) states that "[t]eachers who have a vision of democratic education assume that learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom" (p. 41). In public educational spaces, professional, semi-professional and volunteer educators' work disrupts and engages previously unimagined curriculum beyond state and federal mandates.

In the *Handbook of Public Pedagogy*, Stovall (2010) explains that community engaged researchers must contend with political power structures in schooling spaces. He concludes these influences to be "politics of place" that include "…site specific efforts of policies created by political entities that have a potential to negatively impact the work we do with young people, teachers, community members, and administrators inside and outside traditional schooling spaces" (p. 410). The implications for the educators, in Stovall's words, is that the space occupied becomes an agential player in efforts to create democratic education in urban environments.

Tradition Two: Education as a political act.

Education is political (Grumet, 2010). Educators cannot escape the political impact and moral ramifications of creating or enacting curriculum in schools (Grumet, 2010; Nieto 2006).

The fluidity of the public space of community, school, community member and educator problematizes the teaching role. Within this public space there is a historical precedent for teachers as political agents. Women educators joined suffrage movements or taught adults to conduct literacy classes to counteract Jim Crow laws. While in a complicated time of social conversations about race, sexuality and gender in education, today's educators are joining unions or activist groups like Teacher Activist Network in large numbers (Picower, 2012b). Whether a part of a local or national, union or grassroots organization, women educators have been and are collectively engage in resistance and the political struggle for equitable public education.

The term activism has a sometimes negative but always a political connotation. Both Collay (2010) and Mirra & Morrell (2011) mention that studies of modern day teacher activism has a repeated narrative of redefining the roles and responsibilities of the teacher. The stakes are still high and the risk to professional standing and employment still exist for the teacher activist. Petra Munro Hendry (2011) reminds us of the strife and turmoil experienced by Ella Flagg Young when she became the first female superintendent of Chicago public schools. It is apparent throughout education and curriculum history that engaging in social and educational change as a female educator has career consequences. As Myles Horton (1999) remembers the instructors at Highlander Folk School were more likely to be called Communists than educators due to the promotion of classes with curriculum focusing on racial and economic equality.

Within the traditional schooling space, teachers are either forced out of schools or co-opted to become a manager in a system that impedes the very activist work they initiated. Collay (2010) suggests that teachers should avoid either option because teachers as activists are disruptive in the schooling space which means their work is best when it is kept at the intersection of school, community, students and staff. The work of Clemons, 2014, Collay, 2010, Mirra & Morrell, 2011, suggests that teachers who engage in activism and see themselves as agents of change have a complex sense of professional identity. The work of African American women educators serving in Freedom Schools best exemplifies this type of political activist identity. Yet,

as Munro (1998) suggests, any attempt to theorize or categorize the resistance of women educators under the title of activist will result in futility based on the variations in how women conceive of themselves and their educational labor.

The current political context of schools affects the lives of the women educators in this study. In *Teaching by Numbers*, Taubman (2009) points to a number of dramatic transformations taking place in education. He ties this transformation to the trend to evolving standards and accountability that "…over the past decade profoundly affected all aspects of teaching, schooling, and teacher education in the United States, and now threatens public education itself" (p.12). The audit culture that penalizes teachers through high stakes testing sometimes results in the public shaming of teachers through the publication of test scores (Grumet, 2010; Taubman, 2009). Montaño, Lopez-Tórres, Delissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, (2002) and Crocco & Costigan (2006) cite incidents of further restrictions deskilling teachers through scripted reading programs and mandated curriculum. Grumet (2010) cites a legal precedent that declares a teacher's speech to be owned by the district that hired them. Through regulated curriculum and the reduction of teacher expression and first amendment rights, educators today face serious challenges to sustaining careers in education as public intellectuals working against social inequalities. Ultimately, this work emphasizes that any action by the women in this study are substantial due to the complexities of negotiating the politics of education reform and the gendered expectations of the field.

Tradition Three: Educators navigate their own authority

I train people to do their own talking.

Septima Clark as quoted in Hall, Walker, Charron, & Cline, 2010, p. 31 (NAACP/TN)

Educational authority exists within formal schooling spaces as a system of power and as part of the role of educator. Simply by working in a system that controls and disciplines student and their own bodies, educators conduct themselves as panoptic symbols, their ever watchful eye

on student action (Foucault, 1979). The role of audit culture, the removal of teacher input from curricular decisions and the constant threat of merit based pay continue to impact the student teacher relationship. While the actual authority attributed to teachers is debatable, there remains an expectation of an authoritative role between teachers and students. By negotiating the Foucauldian notion of authority in the classroom, the teacher opens spaces for students to engage in curriculum that prioritizes their cultural knowledge and values. Absolute authority abandoned, culturally relevant and other social justice pedagogies can be adopted and relieve the educator from the position of the sole decision maker of what knowledge is of the most worth. Women educators attempting to make educational experiences more equitable, de-center power from themselves and engage with learning as a citizen in the environment that incorporates student voices. In this type of democratized classroom, the teacher learns from the students as much as the student learns from the teacher.

Clemons' (2014) research interviewing educators who taught at Freedom Schools during the 1960s revealed these women educators wove the teaching narrative in with a personal learning narrative that humanized the educator/student relationship. Clemons noted that teachers willingly gave up the traditional authoritarian role as an educator for the purpose of using education to promote human rights. With the lives of their students at stake, the teachers had to learn from the students and abandon the notion of controlled or predictable curriculum, instead letting the nature of the community shape educational outcomes. The women believed that if "what you teach stays within the pages of a book or article or within the walls of a conference setting, nothing will be learned" (Clemons, 2014, p. 153).

Similarly, Mirra & Morrell (2011) believe that all teachers have potential to become civic agents as long as they are engaged in the process of education in a way that is "collective, productive, and active" none of which operates under the rigid notion of teacher authority. They also note that when successful engagement occurs the educators "…do no teach students; instead, teachers and students educate each other in a dialogic relationship…" (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p.

413). Women educator activists within this tradition bypass the benevolent instinct to "save", instead, demanding social change through their relationships with students and families. With the high stakes for public education, educators in resistance pedagogies become willing to be shaped by as well as shape the communities they enter.

Tradition Four: Enacting the public intellectual

More often than not, teachers acting as public intellectuals is problematic for normative educational structures. Social discourses and capitalist notions of education construct the roles of teachers and educators whether it is 1816 or 2016. Like many current scholars, Pinar (2001) calls for a "resuscitation" in education where teachers regain control of "the means by which teaching and learning is evaluated" (p. 699). Educators, especially female educators, are not just in a position to reclaim the space of the public intellectual but are still confronted with the task of providing evidence for an intellectual tradition of education history (Hendry, 2011). Therefore, engaging in "the public sphere of education", creates a need to question to whose advantage lies the denial of educators in the role of public intellectual (Pinar, 2012, p.50).

The tradition of public intellectualism is initially manifested in the bodily experience of women teachers (Grumet, 1988). Throughout history, as Hendry (2011) explains, women educators' experiences are an epistemological site that foster an understanding of alternative knowledge production. Promotion of alternatives to stereotypical spaces of knowledge production reinforce that women's intellectual labor and experiences are worthy of attention. Women educators engage in political and public action from gendered discourses move through a fluid and evolving sense of self. Navigating discourses to ultimately develop a personal understanding of my own subjectivity and agency within the school building took years to evolve in my consciousness, if I do truly understand it. I would even propose that within this bodily experience of education comes the willingness to acknowledge the self as continually becoming entity that evokes Maxine Greene's (2010) famous line "I am what I am, not yet." Public intellectualism,

for women educators, resists compartmentalized notions of personal and professional self, particularly while demanding the vulnerability that accompanies such acts.

Educators and their roles in society are subjected to the desires of their communities and the sense of agency brought to the role by the person. Much of the scholarship of women educators indicates the oppressive nature of a feminized career in education and the lack of acknowledgement of their intellectual contribution (Crocco, Munro & Weiler, 1999; Hendry, 2011; Munro, 1995). It is important to note, however, that there was a time when teaching was the ultimate act of resistance, a potential for gainful employment within the middle and working class, especially for African American women (Acker, 1995; Galman, 2012; Tamboukou, 2000). Even with the rise of the mothering discourse in education, unmarried female teachers were able to have a place to pursue (limited) intellectual activities with justification (Galman, 2012; Goldstein, 2014). Despite the varied motivation to teach, teaching was still seen as a job of a particular class, particularly by women like Jane Addams, who sought a role as a public educator, rather than a school teacher (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999).

In the late 1800s, the teaching profession was especially important for women of color or of a lower economic class. Complicating the deconstruction of the concept of feminine educator is the knowledge that a teaching career provided the needed leverage for some women to live their lives pursuing racial and gender equality (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler (1999). Most educational history relegates women educators to the notion of "dutiful daughter" always promoting the intellectual endeavors of male experts, without the acknowledgement of their status "seminal" thinkers (Hendry, 2011, p. 19-20).

Since the initial conception of Catherine Beecher's philosophy of woman teachers, women educator intellectuals seek to claim the status and respect of a public scholar. This claiming begins with questioning and reflection on our public and personal history. Feminist scholars like Grumet (1988) and Hendry (2011) suggests the necessity of *remembering* women's experience as a site of knowing. Whether through a highlighting of women's achievements as

scholars or acts of resistance as community workers, the field of education must begin the process of self-reflection as to the acceptability of educator intellectuals. My own experience with pre-service teacher candidates reminds me that the very system of teacher education programs can interfere with the discovery of student's intellectual role in society. Framed in the understanding that sexism still resides in fields like elementary education, we can question a system that "corrupts women's self-knowledge by enculturating them to a worldview that defines them as lesser" (Crocco, Munro & Weiler, 1999, p. 48).

Trends in contemporary scholarship

Scholarship on teacher activists, teachers for social justice or teacher's pedagogical incorporation of local communities and community collaboration are all popular topics for researchers. The majority of work in the field is largely broken two general approaches. One is the exploration of biographic accounts, historical case studies or narratives of educators whose careers are viewed as a legacy of social change and education reform (e.g. Addams, 1961; Casey, 1993; Charron & Cline, 2010; Clemons, 2014; Crocco, Munro & Weiler, 1999; Johnson, 2002; Ramsey, 2012). Scholarship based on teachers with a lifetime of experience as social change agents provide amazing insight into the evolving nature of curriculum and a future of educational possibilities. This type of scholarship was the backbone of constructing a transgenerational understanding of women acting social change agents.

In recent years, however, the trend of scholarship focuses on the more outspoken or political activism of teachers who work in social justice organizations, educational communities or unions to directly confront and change the way education reform from No Child Left Behind altered their daily lives as educators (e.g. Catone, 2014; Collay, 2010; Montaño, Lopez-Tórres, Delissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman 2002; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Picower, 2012b). Often, scholarship takes on the task of understanding why early career teachers choose to become socially aware and active in their school communities and explore attempts of developing this quality of critical pedagogical approaches through teacher education plans (e.g. Boggess, 2010;

Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008; Mirra & Morrell, 2011). This is not to say that some of this scholarship, especially the ones exploring teachers engaged in activist organizations don't offer implications for teacher education programs (e.g. Montaño, Lopez-Tórres, Delissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman 2002; Jackson, 2011).

While this review of literature can only paint a broad view of the scholarship of educator actions in social change, I utilize several trends from contemporary work in my study. There are several recurring themes that are vital for this work. Despite the fact that my research doesn't use the term social justice, which is a nebulous and debatable term, the efforts of educators represented throughout scholarship is motivated by the same values. I want to be as clear as possible when I state that the use of language like 'activism' and 'social justice' is problematic in that the reader may misinterpret my hesitation with these words. My hesitation and lack of fluid usage of any term comes from my caution and lengthy reflection on the political and scholarly implications of such terms. I hope to never take for granted that the terms we employ as scholars are significant to any growth in research. For example, in my own reading of social justice practices in education, I found that I was unsure of the conditions required to move myself from acknowledging a belief in social justice teaching to being a social justice educator. Nunez, Michie, & Konkol's (2015) definition of social justice illustrates my point. They state that "*social justice* is the striving of people in different times and places, under vastly different circumstances, using different tools and tactics to achieve greater freedom, fairness, equity, access, agency, recognition, openness, and sustainability" to illustrate that social justice teaching is "more process than definition" (p. vii). This inspiring definition admits that it social justice evokes an imagery of unyielding action towards a cause. Still, while I want to believe I am in this school of thought, I struggle to see where my own actions have worked to achieve any real progress in these areas. On an academic level, categorizing information into silos of scholarship may actually interfere with the intersectionality of academic work. On a personal level, identity categories, such as "social justice educator" can be detracting from examining the lived experience of women

educators who, like myself, are resistant to self-identification. Regardless of terminology, this work aligns itself with all scholarly endeavors that explore educators working within communities to create social and educational equity.

My research examines two themes related to current trends in scholarship. One theme is the importance of educator action that moves beyond the walls of the classroom and extends the notion of cultural relevant curriculum into the local community (Catone, 2014; Clemons, 2014; Montaño, Lopez-Tórres, Delissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman, 2002; Picower, 2012a, 2012b, Raygoza, 2016). Like Chubbuck & Zembylas (2008), I recognize that there are many competing goals for the social justice educator activist who has multiple roles and limited time. Chubbuck & Zembylas (2008) conclude that teachers should be activists within their own classrooms and with their curriculum, as well as being "called to activism outside of that local context" (p. 283). Interestingly, they find that this pressure for larger community engagement does not exclude expectations that teachers work towards structural reform while also empowering students to create change themselves.

The second theme central, based contemporary scholarship is that of an emotional engagement with parents and students. Catone, (2014) in his portraiture of women educator activists, found the focus of their passion lay with their profound relationship made within their classrooms. Likewise, Chubbuck & Zembylas (2008) note there is a potential price to the emotional experience that socially just teaching invokes. They suggest that the intensity of suffering that is experienced through a teacher's engagement with marginalized students and unfair educational practices produces an intensity of emotions like anticipation, fear and anxiety already experienced in the classroom (p. 286).

It is this very act of emotional engagement through the relationships built through educator practice is one I want to emphasize. While the breadth of scholarship has informed my approach it is repeated emphasis on the human connection that has greased the wheels of this research. While women educators are constantly essentialized by notions of Lady Bountiful,

Ramsey (2012) suggests that a Tamera Beauboeuf-Lafontant's womanist concept of Black women educators shows that some educators "practice caring as a form of activism" (p. 251). Ultimately, the pursuit of democratic education is forged not only by the pedagogy development of the educator but by the continued relationships between individuals in schools and communities. In a sense, all change starts with relationships. In a recent work, Parker Palmer (2011) asked a successful Black pastor for tips to enhance his community organizing activities. The pastor, who successfully facilitated dialogue that negotiated racial and political tensions replied, "potluck suppers" (p.142). Like Palmer acknowledged, the power of relational ways of being are at the core of narratives of action of individual women educators acting as social change agents.

Conclusion

There is a never ending list of educators who have worked to change their communities in response to the call for democratic education throughout our country's history. Much of their work is traceable in our current scholarship on women educators. In this section, I identified traditions of women educators interposed with contemporary connections to scholarship. What I have included is by no means extensive and it is foreseeable that many more traditions of women educators could arise out of more study in this area. Overall, the traditions indicate how women educators must navigate the maternal norms of the Lady Bountiful stereotype and the expectations of power within and outside of the classroom.

The women mentioned here have expanded the role of what educator means and the possibilities within that role. The women referenced in this piece demonstrate a continuity of action that exists from the early days of public education, throughout the many turns of education and society reform to the present day. Women educators, as documented throughout history, rise to the occasion of meeting the next challenge that faces the unnamed masses of the populace and have done so under the lash of inhumane treatment and political censure. I often marvel at the courage it would take to withstand the political backlash Jane Addams experienced for her

criticisms of the government and political leaders. I contemplate the complexity of character and tenacity of women educators during the Civil Rights era as they faced threat of daily physical harm as they asked students and communities to follow them into an unthinkable new world.

It is dangerous to make blanket comparisons to the conservative ideological climate of today's politics that seem laced with xenophobia and intolerant to ethnic and racial demands for justice and reconciliation. The US of the 1950s and 60s threatened the very life of radical educators. Today, conservative environments still pose a risk to social change educators, even if it they are subtler and difficult to identify. While the United States remains divided on social and political issues, the lives of career educators' work continue regardless of endless policy and ideological change. Exploring women educator narratives provides an expansive view into the work of women today, but also pushes against traditions, like those mentioned here, by focusing on women in politically conservative spaces.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodology, in research, is highly debated terminology by qualitative researchers. Graduate students, like myself, devote years to understating theoretical approaches, processes of inquiry, and data collection and analysis techniques. deMarrais and Lapan (2004), explain that methodology is more than method; it involves "the researchers' assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of knowing and knowledge" (p. 5). Likewise, this chapter details the same personal investment into the selection of a theoretical framework and a corresponding methodology. Methodology functions like a theoretically-informed set of tools to answer research questions within this research. On a large scale methodology, consciously chosen, indicates the epistemological, and even ontological, frame that is the foundation of any research. On a smaller scale, methodology lines up a chosen theoretical framework with applicable methods of data collection and analysis.

In an attempt to outline the methodology employed in this work, I explain how I use poststructural feminism as a theoretical guide in this qualitative research. Then, I will explore how narrative inquiry fits within this poststructural approach as an appropriate way to collect and analyze narratives from women educators. Narrative inquiry, like poststructural feminism, has multiple applications; however, this work focuses on how narrative inquiry through a poststructural feminist lens represents experiences without essentializing the narratives and

exploring the layers of complexity in their construction (Jackson, 2001). Poststructural approaches to narratives inquiry is necessary to not just witness a subject's experiences, but also broach the larger forces that influence those experiences. For example, Simone Fullagar's (2004) scholarship uses post-structural perspectives to pursue how subject identity is constituted within various trajectories of experience. Her application of a poststructural approach in travel narratives deconstructs the influence on Western notions of desire. Her scholarship serves as an example for this research on how to approach the deconstruction discourses on women educators in conservative spaces. The remainder of this chapter is divided into sections that describe the macro to micro methodological decisions that guide the process of this research along with a section on ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Within a poststructural feminist lens, this work must wrestle with issues of subject formation, agency, and the resisting and navigating of discourses as a foundation of this research. Judith Butler (1994) questions what we know about the subject pursued by academic scholarship. She explains that the subject is constructed of "organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements" which include "matrices of power and discourse" (p. 9). Subjects are distinguished through "acts of differentiation" from the outside but aren't exclusive or definitive (p.13). Then Butler questions the subject itself, stating that it is never complete, but it is produced again and again. She posits that in the formation of the subject, agency must be constituted within the conceptualization of the subject while being influenced by the cultural context present during construction. As Zerilli (1992) points out, the feminist postmodern writer Kristeva also rejects fixed subjectivity from second wave feminism. Zerilli (1992) examines how Kristeva uses maternity to exemplify an alternative and alien space "…in which the stable subject of humanism vanishes" (p.116). The problem is that while the subject is formed and reformed, we must accept that agency is unilaterally absent instead of inherent in its constituted formation.

Butler (1994) further suggests power constructs the subject, which prompts the question of whether through that "…reworking that very matrix of power by which we are constituted…" we are able to disrupt and destabilize power regimes (p. 14). For if the subject is reformed again and again it signifies the "permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process, one which gets detoured and stalled through other mechanisms of power, but which is power's own possibility of being reworked" (p. 14). The fluidity of the subject does not make it cease to exist, nor does it mean that it is free from the influences of societal discourses. This work establishes itself in the continual reworking of the subject that avoids the pitfalls of essentialism and static identities. I also acknowledge that the political pressures of education implicated in subject formation allows for the same reworking of a subject's agency. Grumet (2010) notes that these political pressures on teachers do not equate with a universal application of agency; otherwise, our political scene would be dominated by a "constituency of 5 million teachers" (p. 67). With Grumet's works in mind, this work situates itself as a deconstructive agent of the discourses that permeate and shape the narratives of the women in this research.

This research, while acknowledging the evolving subject, rejects any views of data as units "out there in the real world waiting to be found" (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). Qualitative study of narratives of women educators resisting (or attempting to resist) power discourses that constitute multiple notions of subjectivity requires a careful methodological approach. These women negotiate discourses that define them in the different intersectional facets of their lives as women and as educators, and this requires consistent application of poststructural feminist tenants on subject formation. Using a poststructural feminist approach enables me to move beyond the difficulties of writing and research that often assume subjects say what they mean or that narratives of subjects are linear and transparent. Given the contradictory, repetitive, and disorganized nature of personal narratives it is an advantage that poststructural feminism allows for the deconstruction of the subject. This is especially useful for examining women educators'

narratives who have had their identities dictated for the purpose of minimizing the legitimacy and standing of the education profession and the women who make it their career.

Using poststructural feminism opens space for these narratives to contain a messy and complicated notion of agency and subjectivity. This is exemplified in Lather and Smithies' (1997) work that carefully assembled the stories of women with HIV. Poststructural feminism can be seen as safeguarding women subjects by preventing discourses as the only view of the women themselves. Poststructuralism, as Ellsworth (1989) notes in her critique of the application of critical theory, resists the fruitless aims of empowering, which "treats the symptoms, but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched" (p. 306). Ellsworth also notes that poststructuralism disrupts essentialized notions of identity while allowing complexity of the subject occupying numerous positions to ultimately defy the categorization of "Otherness" (p. 322).

Weedon (1996) and St. Pierre (2000) heavily emphasize Foucault in their application of poststructural feminist research. Foucault's extensive writing on power and the nature of the subject, as well as the interpretation of theorists like Weedon and St. Pierre, influence this work. St. Pierre's application of Foucault emphasizes that when we exclude false notions of liberation and freedom from some type of binary imposition, subjects are free change and "what may seem necessary or set in stone, hardly ever is" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 493). Weedon (1996) explains how Foucault's emphasis on history in power and discourse is advantageous to the work of feminists. Likewise, the women of this study cannot escape the historic construction of the modern education system as a disciplinary structure with unique panoptic features that shape women educators' lives (Foucault, 1979). As Bushnell (2003) explains it, much of a teacher's identity is constructed "…through their interactions with others including students, their own families, other educators and the general public" (p. 257). Given the dynamics of power and surveillance that educators negotiate, use of post-structural feminism provides flexibility to explore resistance to those same power structures.

In similar research on educator subjectivity, Alecia Jackson (2001), employs poststructural deconstruction of her participant to explore "how her subjectivities shifted among competing discourses within the discursive field of her student teaching experience" (p. 386). Jackson used the local, situated knowledge of Annie's sense of self in shifting power positions as a student teacher in other teacher's classrooms. Jackson is able to deconstruct Annie's experience from the barrage of discourses to move beyond what does Annie's experience mean to ask "How does discourse function?" (p. 395). Narratives are a snapshot of the situated knowledge and discourses that influence the subjectivity and agency of a subject. Utilizing poststructural feminism in congruence with Jackson, will alleviate the problems of essentializing and constraining my participants, while allowing for multiple versions of themselves to exist contradictorily in positions that are emerging and unfolding.

Research Design Methodology

According to Hendry (2010), narrative inquiry in its broadest conceptualization is the documentation of any and all human experience. Hendry suggests that, as researchers, we move beyond a qualitative view of narrative and focus on narrative as a process of meaning making. From Hendry's view point, this research focuses on symbolic narratives that focus on human experience. At the same time the use of symbolic narratives desires to represent a verisimilitude of experience it resists critiques that narratives are less valid than a more scientific view of research (p. 73). The narratives of women educators are included in this symbolic narrative portrayal. The specifics of their personal negotiations in a conservative climate is not meant to mirror or replicate another educator's experience for the traditional quantitative purpose of generalization.

Chase (2013), like Hendry, acknowledges that narrative inquiry's focus on lived experience equips qualitative researchers to explore narratives for resistance to "dominant cultural assumptions" (p. 58). Additionally Chase (2013) notes that the storytelling that takes place between participants and researchers "provides a window to the contradictory and shifting

nature of hegemonic discourses" (p.57). This means that narratives essentially disrupt the effect of oppressive discourses making them especially valuable when exploring stories of participants who resist essentializing discourses. Educators in this study who resist the essentialized notion of teacher fall within this category.

Narrative inquiry is an appropriate tool for research focused on women educator experiences as well as research guided by poststructural feminist theory. Casey's (1993) study of histories of women teachers who devote themselves to social change is a classic example of rich narrative data centering stories of professional and personal agency. Munro (1998) uses a form of narrative, called life histories, because she believed it could highlight the gender, power, and resistance in women educators lives. Munro's attempt to understand how these women make meaning of their lives is further developed by her focus using a poststructural lens. Through this approach, Munro is able to focus on the narrative that is a construction of identity while pursuing the discourses that construct women's sense of selves. Taking Munro's example, this work acknowledges the constructive forces of the discourses that surround women educators while exploring their resistance to these forces in pursuit of actions for social equity.

Britzman (2003), like Munro, challenges common representations of teachers' experiences in education by challenging the status quo of ethnographic practice that suggests "that the ethnographer is capable of producing truth from the experience of being there and the reader is receptive to the truth of the text" (p. 244). Britzman complicates research claims about truth and representation by following a poststructural process to highlight the role of what is missing against what is present in the data. She pushes against reality claimed through academic pursuit. Much like her questioning, this research utilizes the poststructuralist tenets to deconstruct women's narratives in order to reduce the authoritarian influences of the research process. The impact of the researcher is minimalized when poststructural feminism directs the use of narrative methodology. As Britzman describes this application in her research as holding onto narratives of

teaching that were "… a complex of contradictory interpretations and competing regimes of truth" (p. 246).

Cris Mayo (2013), also challenged the tradition of humanistic approaches to women's stories. Her work disrupts "individualistic humanism that valorized the 'reality' of personal experience and the transparency of oral accounts…" (p.413). Mayo's work builds upon what she describes as a rich history of poststructural theorists who focus on oral or life histories. The language that accompanies these narratives are central to the task of understanding discursive interplay on women's subjective stance and agency. Mayo analysis centers on "how each woman took up or resisted these discourses" (p. 414).

Participant Selection

Patton (2002) explains that while some participant selection strategies are for the purpose of generalization, purposeful sampling is not done for the purpose of generalization, but to elicit a deep description and "in depth understanding" (p. 46). This study's central focus is the stories of women educators acting as agents of social change in conservative spaces. This specific purpose necessitates a small group of targeted participants. Patton describes the need to use purposeful sampling in research that centralizes the need for "information rich" data (p. 230). I considered the possible implications of targeting a specific group of people such as women educator agents of change. I hoped to avoid reinforcing specific educator discourses. However, purposeful selection in the research is appropriate because poststructuralism focuses on subject actions as a function of discourse (Blumenreich, 2004).

While the sample size of four participants for this research is small, the purposeful sampling employed attempts a level of heterogeneity in the participants. While three of my participants were in their forties, one of my participants was in her mid-twenties. In an attempt to "maximize the variation" of stories from women educator participants, I attempt to gather participation from women of different racial and social class. Generalization is not the purpose of this research; however, the subjectivities and agency of the women educators in this study comes

from the context of their lived experiences. Attempting to diversify the participants provides an opportunity to hear from women educators of differing backgrounds and perspectives of living and working in politically conservative areas. The sample size of this study is small, but advantageous in the sense that I was able to get to know the participants at greater depth and spend more time analyzing the data.

I made several decisions when conceptualizing the project that impacted participant selection. The first was that I wanted this project to be based, initially, out of Oklahoma. Oklahoma was a natural choice due to my long family history of living within Indian Territory, long before statehood. I essentially grew up Okie, as Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (1998) describes it. Oklahoma makes for a particularly interesting location for exploring educator actions in conservative areas because in the course of its complicated history, Oklahoma, ironically, has moved from "Red" to "red" (Dunbar, 1998, p.229). The irony comes from the ideological hope of equality brought by the socialist movement that evaporated after violent clashes between tenant farmers and wealthy land owners known as the Green Corn Rebellion. Violent responses to economic and political policy led to the weakening of the socialist party in Oklahoma and furthered the conservative stronghold that exists today.

I selected Oklahoma City as the center for participant selection based on my prior knowledge and experience having been an educator in Oklahoma City Public Schools for seven years and living in close proximity to the city my entire life. When I first conceptualized this project I knew that I wanted to draw from a pool of educators from my first-hand knowledge and connections in Oklahoma City. I knew that my experience working with different schools and populations in Oklahoma City would give me an advantage in analyzing the narratives.

The field of education can be somewhat small and many educators have multiple connections to each other. One of the participants who ended up in this study was a woman that I knew and worked with indirectly for over seven years. However, I was aware of the educational efforts of other participants based on other personal and professional connections. Based on these

connections, I was able to approach these two individuals to participate in this study. Even though I was able to approach two women who ultimately agreed to participant at the onset of this research, I was still eager to employ a purposeful sampling strategy to meet the standards of diversity and expand the representation of experiences.

I wanted to have a second source to expand the scope for potential participants. Exploring my connections, I found a non-profit group who invite educators and concerned citizens in the Oklahoma City area to participate in a leadership training that helps attenders to propose and make changes to their neighborhoods and schools. After approaching the non-profit community-based training program, I was invited to participate in their program and attend several meetings, which I did. In doing so, I found several of my connections in Oklahoma City also have connections with this non-profit group. Unfortunately, due to a lack of organization on the part of the non-profit, they failed to send out the questionnaires to gain participants for this study. While they had been amenable to the idea of participating in this research and help me gain access to potential participants, their work sidelined this opportunity.

I contacted potential educators through introductions by others or directly. I contacted women initially by email and followed up with them by phone to walk through the questionnaire and explain the purpose and process of this research. In an attempt to create a diverse group of participants from various class and racial backgrounds as well as school teachers and community members, I approached participants based on those who would represent different experiences in teaching and the community who are known either publicly or through a personal connection to possibly be a change agent in their community. Fortunately, I was only able to find two more participants through what turned into type of expert referral through other connections that were familiar with my research. While I initially thought that I would have several participants to choose from to meet diversity requirements for this research, I ultimately had only four educators who responded to my request to take the questionnaire and agreed to participate. These four turned out to be the participants in this study.

When I first contacted the four participants, I explained the purpose of the study and received permission to electronically send them the participant questionnaire, or in several cases, read the questionnaire questions to them by phone. Their responses to the questionnaire indicated they met the description of participant I was seeking, someone who saw themselves as contributing to social change and/or democratic education in their schools and community. Based on their answers, I invited them to participate in the interview and data collection process, to which they agreed. Interestingly, my personal knowledge of two participants and the expert referral of the other two likely increased the likelihood of their fit in this research and their agreement to participate. Regardless of how they came to this research, having participants self-identify as an agent of change was the most important piece of the participant selection process.

Data Collection

I met with participants, at their convenience, for one to two hours for each of the two interviews. In total, I collected over ten hours of interview data. I traveled to Oklahoma City, or the surrounding suburbs to meet with them. At the time they agreed to participate in this research, I explained that participation would consist of two interviews and a follow up to collect a visual representation of their experiences as agents of change. I explained at the beginning and then at the completion of our interviews that a visual representation of their work was useful to examine their experience from another, more artistic perspective. I suggested that participants use collage, newspaper clippings, poetry, paintings, photographs; anything that they wanted to use that would show visually how they identify themselves or see their experience as agents of change. I waited until after the interviews to approach the participants about the visual representations. Only two out of the four responded to follow up emails about the visual representation and the two that responded claimed a lack of time was interfering with the request. Ultimately, the women did not participate in the visual representation portion of this research. Upon reflection, I am not surprised that this happened. Each of the women had workloads that far exceeded a typical teaching job. Each was involved in multiple committees or projects that required their attention.

At several points in each of the interviews, I was aware that the women had to juggle their time in order to speak with me. It didn't escape me that for a busy educator, the gift of time is incredibly valuable.

I was able to interview each participant for up to two hours for two interviews. Generally, I was able to interview the participants with about a week between each conversation. Each interview could have gone on well past the time the participant had allotted and each conversation seemed somehow unfinished. At the conclusion of each interview I sat in my car and wrote extensive fieldnotes summarizing my experiences and later retyped those notes to make sure, after continued reflection, that I had left nothing out. I found that there was no end to the amount each woman could share while reflecting on their experience. I cherish the time I spent talking with each of them. After the interview, I asked the participants to follow up with me to provide further explanation or corrections as a member check of the data. As the months passed between our initial conversations, I was not as successful contacting the women. Ultimately, none of the women responded to prompts to correct or provide further input on the research process.

Data Analysis

Jerome Bruner (1987) suggests that individuals become the narratives they create in the sense that "[n]arrative imitates life and life imitates narratives" (p. 692). In a different turn, Munro (1998) suggests "[t]here is no identity outside of narrative" (p. 6). Women educator narratives in this study represent the discursive construction of the experience and the participant's sense of self. This sense of self can be fragmented and changing as evident in their story of themselves as agents of social change. To explore these narratives I utilize a layered approach to data analysis. Poststructural feminist approaches acknowledge the danger of simplifying participant data into transparent excerpts of reality (Britzman, 2003). Cautioned by this danger and mindful of the messiness of narratives, I used my fieldnotes and the interview transcripts to pursue member's meaning and write progressive memos about the content, context, and psychological aspects of the interviews (Bruner, 1987). In the following paragraphs I will

explain each the process of analysis employed in this narrative research guided by poststructural feminist principles.

The analysis comes from two main sources of data. The first is the fieldnotes I kept from each interview, where I wrote a fieldnote detailing the experience, participant behaviors and my initial thoughts and feelings based on the interaction. Transcriptions representing participant's experience served as the second source of data for analysis. Both sources served as a component of the analysis process that deepens with each venture into the data. The process of analysis moves inward from the initial assertions based an early readings of the data to empirical assertions based on emic meanings from the participants and integrative memos as described in Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011).

The fieldnotes served as a rich data source as I reviewed and added notes after meeting with each participant. These notes were the beginning of what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) describe as the process of reading, a loose type of open coding. Additionally, I actively wrote research memos throughout the process similar to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) and Erikson's (1988). Both encourage the writing and revising assumptions and warrants through an examination of the corpus of the data. Viewing the data as a whole, and not picking and choosing data to support my interpretation of member's meanings or focusing on structural details felt consistent with my poststructural feminist stance. Continual memoing allowed me to spiral further into the data until I felt comfortable with the conflicting messiness of the participants' experiences.

Likewise, I chose not to formally code the data as a way to keep the "structural features" of the narratives intake and reject reducing the narratives into fragmented units (Riessman, 2008, p. 12). Following Riessman's (2008) lead, I believe that thematic analysis can be done in lieu of coding that focuses on what is said in the data, the context that is embedded in the data and mindfulness of the researcher's main focus. Employing this type of thematic analysis is necessary to maintain the integrity of the poststructural feminist foundation of this research. Blumenreich

(2004), explains that the poststructural approaches for narrative inquiry require that we move away from work, like portraiture, that positions the research as the one who "situates" and labels the participants (p. 78). Blumenreich's (2004) view that narratives have to aid the reader to experience a vicarious experience rebuts claims to lift phrases from or otherwise fragment the narrative, even if the narrative is constructed with the help of the researcher.

Interestingly, Kvale (1996) reminds us not to overvalue the role of transcriptions in data analysis by reminding us that what is not said is as important as what is said. In my first stage of analyzing the transcripts, I examined the role of the interview questions seeing that, like Riessman (2008) suggests, there was more that was being said than just responses to the interview questions Responses by women agents of change, in this study, could refer to their multiple relationships and ways of being in different contexts. In fact, Riessman (2008) suggests that interview questions give way to conversations where the interviewer transfers power to the participant and what transpires is an interaction that is unique to the time and situation of those present. While trying to identify multiple expressions of subjectivity, I had hoped to minimize my impact on these narratives. I concede that, to some extent, the research invariably becomes part of the context that shapes the narrative during the course of the interview process, meaning that the participants may have behaved or told their narratives differently to me than they would have to professional colleagues, family, or other agents of change. The extent to which they represent their experiences or my view of their experiences is still largely unknown to me as each women has multiple lives and identities shaped by different discursive forces and not all of which are negative (Munro, 1998). For the purpose of this research, I believe that the narratives that became transcripts that became storied versions of experiences is a single expression of experiences out of a multitude of possible narratives of these women educators.

Themes that were gathered through a loose open coding of fieldnotes became more expansive as I combed through the transcripts, often using color to represent visually the elements that comprised each narrative (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 2011). I began to see a rhythm that was

established in the course of each interview based on my questioning and the intense engagement of each participant in the interview process. I chose not to pursue any strict chronological or structural approach to the narratives instead putting groups of narratives together and examining what that groupings looked like as a whole and then periodically examining the outcome to the memoing that I had done at different stages of the process in order to see where I, the researcher, was in the evolution of the narratives. I found on several occasions that I had overreached in shaping narratives, especially Violet's and Tulip's, and was forced to examine what role my expectations played in this research. I struggled trying to maintain the women's unique flavor or voice in the experiences that are important to this research rather than fragmenting the narratives with formal coding. Each participant's narrative could be turned into a story with a plot, characters, conflicts and villains, an easily inferred beginning, middle, and end. Thus, I pruned away the repeated wordings and reinforced a logical flow in the narratives through light reorganization if they were initially presented as circular or disjointed (Blumenreich, 2004). This was a labor intensive effort that led to multiple constructions of each participant's narrative. Each time I constructed a narrative, I returned to the transcripts and re-listened to the original recordings to compare the tone and nuance to my construction. I also continued to memo about my own emotional reactions and resistance to some parts of the narratives as a check on my own position within the research. I experimented with various lengths and styles of the narratives to examine the formats effect on the reader. As the final result, each participant has a story with five rhetorical turns.

The first turn is their story where they locate themselves and the catalyst that prompted them to pursue social change. Following their origin story, they recount their actions in response to the catalyst. Afterwards, the story introduces the 'villain' or conflict related to their conservative environment that appeared in their attempts to remediate a type of injustice or promote equitable democratic education. The last important turn in their story is how they see themselves and their work, especially in reference to the identity categories and their own shifting

subjectivity. The turns in the story represent plot structure that has a loosely formed beginning, middle, and end. While I had initially left each narrative in this beginning, middle, and end construction, the chance to locate and analyze nuances of the narratives for experience was lost in the storied format. In most cases, the storied format would have been beneficial, but in the case the overwhelming nature of the story made it difficult to focus succinctly on the discursive influences on the participants' experiences. Ultimately, I settled on arranging the constructed narratives by the rhetorical turns in the story so that each experience related to the individual turns would be grouped together. Arranging the narratives of the four participants' by these turns in their story allowed me to foreground my theoretical analysis. This presentation also aids the reader's experience of the narratives in a meaningful and organized way regardless of ambiguity and messiness relayed through the participants words (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis came naturally through the process of portraying the narratives in this rhetorical story structure and again by related turns and was done without unnecessary fragmentation that would break the experience into what St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) call "brute data" (p. 716).

While I spent a lot of time exploring themes throughout the narratives, I tried to move beyond sifting through the data with a larger lens to explore turns and shifts in each participants description of subjectivity as agents of change. Rather than relying on my ability to derive themes, especially through coding, I was able to utilize the poststructural perspective of discerning discursive structures in the nuances of the narratives. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) validate this layered approach to data analysis that avoids coding. They suggest that those researchers who select what constitutes data and then sample various techniques of coding for the purpose of locating what they are seek (themes) are ultimately aligning to positivistic ideals of research. Doing so not only undermines the legitimacy of qualitative research, they assert that by assuming coding represents a more valid approach to analysis, it leaves little time or energy for subsequent theorizing.

Ethical Considerations

Narrative inquiry is a personal and vulnerable approach to data collection (Chase, 2013). The biggest concern in narrative research is the portrayal of narratives and the analysis drawn from their construction, while also disrupting the narratives with the identification of discoursive elements. Even the framing of the narrative is problematic when presented in the limited space of academic research, posing problems of representation. In this poststructural feminist approach, this is particularly problematic because the narratives focus on the identity and experience of being an agent of change while acknowledging that there is no meaningful stable or fixed identity. Instead, the representation is intended to show multiple lives of participants that evolves from "multiple re-interpretation" of the participant during the interview process (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 81). Blumenreich (2004) explains that this re-interpretation takes place as the researcher experiences the participant's disjointed reflections, tangential conversations, and contradictory expressions of self and experience. Therefore representation can never be fully expected to represent any sort of positivistic version of truth or reality. Even though representation is troubled in poststructural research, I attempt to expose how I edited and use the data for the purpose of answering my research questions. Transparency reduces the power positions in research to avoid the inference of an all knowing researcher who seemingly plucked themes from the sky and leave no evidence of their part in the construction of narratives or the analysis (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Cris Mayo (2013) explained that "[a]ccepting the interpretive process necessarily appropriates the experience, stories, and texts of people being researched, and that the researcher's authority can never be fully undermined are important methodological admissions" (p. 414). Likewise, I remained mindful of my power and position within the research and the politics of representation that impact the participants. This research focuses on the resistance of conservative cultural and political ideology that pervade the spaces the women educators occupy. Therefore, all interpretations of these narrative were done mindful of the risks for those participants and their overall efforts.

Member checks are employed in an attempt to engage the participant in the process and add to the rigor to qualitative research (Riessman, 2008). Unfortunately, only one participant responded to my member checking request and the response was superficial. I believe, as Riessman (2008) indicates that even into the interpretive process of data analysis, participant's right to speak or write as they choose should be preserved as part of an ethical research relationship. Unfortunately, as women educators and agents of change my participants lead incredibly busy lives. It was challenging for them to accommodate my interview schedule and meet twice for up to two hours. It is understandable that they would be reluctant to respond to invitations for further input in the form of member checks or requests for visual representations of their experiences. It is worth considering that the women could have felt comfortable with my role in the construction of the narratives based on the rapport I developed with each. It may also be that these women believed that in the hands of researchers, their words and experiences can never live up to their intended meaning they withdrew from the process thinking it unbeneficial. This illustrates the dynamic and changing relationship between participant and the researcher. At the conclusion of this research, I can only assert that my own role in the construction of the narratives and my assertions through analysis are conscious of my own positionality and the discourses that impact my own experiences as a woman educator.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness within narratives means that the narratives themselves have to represent the experience of the participant as it is created within the storytelling process. Within this process is the understanding that people's experiences and, therefore, their stories are contradictory and non-sequential (Chase, 2013). This means that researchers must take special care in their interpretations and push against their own claims or political motivations to pursue alternative interpretations. Trustworthiness isn't located within the narrative itself, but what claims are made about those narratives by the researcher. This is aided by the inclusion of other sources to strengthen understanding of the narrative. Ultimately, I decided to layer input into this

study to reinforce the rigor and trustworthiness of the narratives I interpreted. Collaboration was key to fortifying this research. The experiences of my advisor and another committee member for this research nourished the interpretative process through their own parallel research. Working with researchers who intimately understood acting as social change agents in Oklahoma helped me push back against my own inclinations in early stages of thematic analysis. This opened me up to my own inherent biases and the situated discourses that I negotiate as a researcher. Thus, the quality and the rigor in this research stems my layered and theoretically informed approach to the examination of transcripts, audio recordings, and fieldnotes, the construction of narratives, and the analysis of women educators' experiences.

CHAPTER IV

EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN EDUCATOR CHANGE AGENTS

This research study centers on the experience of women educators who work as agents of change in their educational sites or communities in conservative spaces. Likewise, this work sought narratives that explore what it means to be an agent of change from diverse perspectives. Four women with urban education experience shared their experiences in the course of two interviews apiece. Each woman represents a diverse perspective of educational spaces and different experiences directly or indirectly facilitating change. Two of the women represent diverse racial and cultural heritage and two represent different experiences as agents of change as white middle class women. While all four women have experience as an educator in an urban setting, their professional and personal experience in promoting change is varied. Each individual represents a different perspective of working with students in public education.

Despite the participants' diverse experiences, their commonalities indicate a need for an inclusive definition of the term "educator" that considers both classroom teacher and other education positions within that category. This work does not presume a particular level of success or impact of such action on educational spaces because to do so would begin a process of quantification which could possibly be exclusionary for educators in places like Oklahoma. Instead, this study seeks themes in the narratives among educators working for change in a highly conservative social and educational environment in order to identify resistance that has been

previously unnoticed, challenged, or disregarded.

This chapter will begin with a brief introduction to the four women in order to understand the unique perspectives that frame each narrative. Following the introductions, I will lay out five rhetorical turns, through their own words. This rhetorical structure will lay out the women's catalyst for wanting to create change and their subsequent focus. Then their actions, their conflict with conservativism, and their reflections will supply the body of the narratives. While each woman deserves to tell her story without interruption, to explore commonalities and rethink the actions of women educators in conservative spaces, the women's words will be presented within a narrative framework that allows for a cross-examination of four very different stories. While I do construct participant's narratives into rhetorical turns, I keep as close to the original recordings as possible. In doing so, I am hoping to let the women, when possible, speak for themselves.

Part of the ongoing debate for the role of teacher in American schools hinges on the belief of the role of education and educator in students' lives. In many education classes, students are asked to examine their own views in regards to determining the role of public education, just as the participants here have done. Educators or communities may favor curriculum that promotes different values and solutions to perceived problems. Attempts to examine educators' actions as change agents, activists or within the nebulous label of social justice, reveal a variation of education's philosophical stances and social contexts. The participants in this research have all attempted to change apparent inequity in their daily roles as educators. However, their narratives reveal a strong distinction between what type of action they choose in relation to the proximity of authority that could alter their actions. In two participant's narratives, their work within the community appears to offer a less-restrictive environment than change attempted within a school system. The spaces negotiated by each participant impacts the type of change attempted.

The following section will outline the four participant's motivation and actions towards creating change I do not judge the type of action undertaken by each; each action is analyzed based on the individual narratives. There is, however, a need to identify interrelated themes

within the four narratives regardless of the action taken. The act of creating change, the reasons articulated, and the spaces in which it was attempted is of particular importance to this work. This section and all subsequent sections will follow the experiences, in order, of Violet, Jasmine, Tulip, and Peony.

Introduction

Violet is a middle class white woman in her forties. She worked at the largest urban district in Oklahoma City for nine years. She worked in two different high schools, both low performing. Violet and I have known each other for about fourteen years. We worked for the same district for seven years and frequently talked about urban education. Violet informed me that while she may not really be of much help in this research, she felt that reflecting on her time in Oklahoma City was cathartic and worthwhile.

Jasmine, was introduced to me through my dissertation advisor. She is a phenomenal Taiwanese Palestinian woman in her twenties. She developed, organized and executed a community learning group for teenage women and LGBT youth to study feminism and cultural studies literature. Through her project, *Making HerStory*, she gained experience meeting community organizers and activists across the country. At the height of her success with *Making HerStory*, she returned to school to get her master's degree in counseling to become a school counselor at her high school alma mater. As a former student of the school, she seeks to change the community by helping shape students into future leaders. Her narrative reflections of cover her time as a full time facilitator of *Making HerStory*, her time as a graduate student and intern, and now as high school counselor.

Tulip is a Cherokee Hawaiian woman in her forties. She is the director the Indian Education program for a large urban school district in Oklahoma. Tulip, like her family, has worked a long time in Indian Education and serves on boards both locally and nationally. Recently on a panel, she was declared fellow activist by anti-mascot activist Amanda Blackhorse. Tulip's life, personally and professionally, is intertwined with the promotion of sovereignty

through education and the effects of a colonized culture. I met Tulip through an introduction from a mutual friend. For some time, I have been an admirer of Tulip's work helping end the "redskin" mascot at a high school in Oklahoma City.

Peony, a white middle class woman in her forties, was introduced to me through professional connections. For many years, Peony had been a Social Studies teacher at a suburban high school near Oklahoma City. Later, Peony went back to graduate school to get her doctorate. Peony, now a professor at a local university, teaches education majors and directs a program for urban preservice teachers. Peony, was the first self-identified "agent of change" in this study. She encourages teachers to claim their identity as a change agent to empower them to create change in their schools and communities.

Rhetorical Turn I

This first rhetorical turn describes the origin story of the women educators. This not only orients the narratives in their personal perspectives but offers insight into the situations that lead themselves to becoming agents of change.

Violet. Violet describes herself as a "middle class white woman" in her forties. She worked for nine years in two of the lowest performing high schools in the Oklahoma City area. With degrees in English and Art History, Violet became alternatively certified as a 9th and 10th grade English teacher. Her first two teaching jobs were in rough areas where gang activity was common and the schools were in jeopardy of being taken over by the state of Oklahoma for low test scores. Violet's witnessing the systemic racism and inequality of resources in public education helped fuel her indignation of education inequality in her schools. She was drawn to promote equal access to quality education and began her attempts to create change through her curriculum design as a classroom instructor and a department head. Violet chose to challenge the status quo within her classroom rather than in a public forum. Throughout her narrative, Violet reflects on issues of race and politics that dominated her daily life. She ultimately left urban education two years ago to teach in her hometown, a nearby suburb with a reputation of academic

excellence. The chaos of trying to meet the requirements of a newly procured Race to the Top grant and endless teacher evaluations as part of a school at risk of closure preceded her exit from urban education.

I met Violet many years ago and liked her instantly. We became alternatively certified around the same time and both worked at schools in Oklahoma City. We used to spend hours talking about education politics and the struggles of daily life inside our classrooms. Together, we drank a lot of coffee and spent many hours challenging each other's perspectives to gain more insight and expertise. Violet's quiet demeanor and small frame does not represent her tenacious dedication to urban education, where she spent the majority of her career. While I took a suburban teaching position to begin my Ph.D. in education, she remained in urban education. Although she would often ask me about the differences in suburban and urban teaching experiences, she felt compelled to stay when she saw the catastrophic combination of low academic expectations and poor academic performance in her school. She felt, at least for a time, that she was needed and had the ability to create change.

Violet's act of change was to challenge the status quo for the students in a school with little documented academic success and provide curriculum that mirrored successful high performing schools. The administration continually pressured Violet to "fix" her students. However, to fix her students, Violet was instructed to do more than provide quality English instruction and raise test scores. She was asked to produce a change in her students that mimicked the *Freedom Writers*, a movie she consistently referred to in our conversations. Violet's struggle worsened due to a disconnect between what the administration demanded of her and her own expectations and ideals. On top of that there seemed to be a racial and class divide that provided an obstacle between her wants and needs, and those of her students.

Jasmine. Jasmine describes herself as an Asian and Palestinian woman in her twenties. She worked for several years developing a community feminist group for young women of color to study feminist and ethnic studies literature. Through this study, high school students embarked

on a path of self-discovery that led them to act against racist and patriarchal elements in their local communities. Her life, full from sustaining a community activist group and her own higher education, was inspired and mentored by programs and activists nationally. She was able to reflect on her pursuit of social change in Oklahoma through the lens of other activists. Consumed with the work of creating change in herself and others, Jasmine also struggled to find a path that balanced family, career, and organizing. Ultimately, Jasmine withdrew from the public side of her activism to heal from the untimely death of her father and focus on a career in education as a counselor in her high school alma mater, which is also an urban school in the same district as Violet. Jasmine recently completed her first year in that school.

Jasmine, unlike timid Violet, acknowledges that most people would consider her an activist, a term she provided. Serious, yet personable, Jasmine demands a level of intimacy in conversation that reveals her suspicion of outsiders and her passion for her work. She spent years of her young life developing a plan to empower minority women with feminist thought and a cultural connection to minority activists. For several years in her late teens and early twenties, Jasmine sought out people who validated her own experience and helped her cultivate a community course that promoted social change through critical and feminist discourse. Her narrative of current action to create change has shifted greatly in the past year. As she graduated with her master's degree and entered the workforce, she felt new obstacles in her ability to create change. Jasmine's vocation seemed, at first, to match her passion for change in her neighborhood, but later she saw the boundaries and limitations of a public education space.

While Jasmine's time as a facilitator offered her a chance to empower youth throughout the city, her time as a counselor brought her in close proximity to the youth of her neighborhood. Jasmine's professional motivation comes from her personal experiences going to the very high school in which she now works.

"Even when I was a student [in this] high school, I didn't feel like I was given equal access to education as students who went to, say, Edmond Public Schools or even

went to a school like Classen SAS. I didn't feel like I had that same kind of rigor. I also didn't feel like I had the same type of expectations as other students, so, I do think it is very important, but I think that the grim reality in OKCPS is that sometimes that isn't necessarily happening. Whether it is due to budgetary issues or also due to certain teachers not being given the proper resources in some instances. But I think in other instances there is a lack of, I don't know, cultural awareness and understanding of the realities of students and how to work with them.

Some of the fun of talking with Jasmine is due to her passion. I would find myself in tears or protesting loudly over stories that she shared. She has a fire within her that is infectious and inspiring. An intriguing turn in her story is the explanation of why she downshifted from her more noticeable role as a community facilitator to become a high school counselor.

Tulip. Tulip describes herself as Cherokee and Hawaiian woman who grew up on a Navajo reservation where her parents taught. Her grandmother, a native Cherokee speaker, learned English as a second language. She is heavily involved in the cultural activities and raises her children to speak several tribal languages and understand their rich family history. Tulip directs Indian education and services in a large urban district in Oklahoma City. As a Native American woman, Tulip brings her identity into the political, professional and personal aspects of her job. Tulip is responsible for overseeing the assistance of over 3,000 students from 72 different tribes. Tulip is responsible for a staff that works with Indian students and their families. While serving on national Indian Education committees, Tulip became actively involved with the anti-mascot movement and was declared a fellow activist by national leader, Amanda Blackhorse. Tulip's approach to creating change is shaped by a daily effort to combat ignorance. School employees often know little, if anything, about Native American history. Many have little experience with issues facing modern Native American students. The pinnacle of her professional and personal success came when parents rallied her to turn a report to the school board into a passionate and intelligent request to change a mascot at a local high school. Tulip's

professional and personal life overlap to the point that her career is an extension of what she lives every day. Tulip navigates her overwhelming work and personal life with a strong sense of self and direction, and the loving assistance other women elders. Also, it is important to note that throughout this chapter and dissertation, I will be using the term "Indian" as Tulip uses it herself. At times, it is more correct and meaningful to apply the term "Native American" (or "Native") versus "Indian" depending on formality and whether the audience is native or non-native. In this more familiar setting, Tulip uses the term Indian in a familial and localized way. I continue her use of the term in the same fashion.

It was a treat to interview Tulip. She is well known in the Oklahoma Indian Education community. Meeting her was like meeting a celebrity. I could barely contain my excitement to speak with the public face of the mascot change movement at a large local high school. To have the chance to speak with her on such a personal level was deeply impactful for me. Tulip is open, generous and loud. She speaks with a level of honesty that comes from wisdom born of experience and an unwavering passion to help Native children. In her current position she serves as a director for a department that serves children in an urban school district. Tulip reports there are roughly 72 tribes represented in the district which is more than the 39 tribes that currently reside in Oklahoma.

Tulip's vision, strength of character and sense of purpose guides her through a tough position. Tulip takes on battles with the community and the district on behalf of her "kids". She focuses on unity instead of tribal division and instills a sense of community where individual kids face homelessness and poverty. While her students may not have individualized language lessons specific to their tribe, they do have exposure to Native values at the core to Native culture. While it is important for every Native child to experience and live among cultural values, it is vital to the educational experiences of urban Native children. Most tribal governments are located far outside of the urban landscape, leaving some Native children culturally isolated and enveloped by

the demands of an urban environment. Tulip navigates these difficulties while also employing her motto “We can only help one family at a time”.

Peony. Peony describes herself as a middle class white woman in her forties with eighteen years as a high school social studies teacher in an affluent suburban school system near Oklahoma City. Since becoming a professor, Peony’s career centers on training preservice teachers for work in urban areas. Recently, she was made a coordinator of a multi-partner urban teacher preparation program where she designs curriculum to help preservice teachers learn tools to work with the community to become “agents of change”. Peony orients all of her instruction for urban preservice teachers on the historical legacy of segregation and educational policies that shaped the Oklahoma City of today. Mirroring her own experience, she hopes to move students inclined to teach in urban areas from wanting to save the children, to helping them seek change in their own communities. She believes that pursuing local history is the essential for teachers seeking to work in a place in which they are unfamiliar.

Peony and I met through a strange set of circumstances. After rattling the halls of OSU as a grad student looking for subjects, I was led to Peony based on her use of the phrase ‘agent of change’ at a professional meeting. It turns out that Peony, in an entirely different setting and context, had been using that exact phrase as an outcome objective on a preservice teacher training she coordinated. At first, our conversations centered on her thoughts surrounding that phrase, but quickly evolved into her thinking and action as a teacher. Her experience as a secondary social studies teacher set a foundation of resistance to curriculum and administrative restrictions that contribute to her role today in higher education.

Rhetorical Turn II

In the next phase of rhetorically constructed narratives, I grouped the participants’ narratives based on their stories of recognizing the need for change in their environments. These narrative excerpts serve as a catalyst or sorts for their actions.

Violet. It was painful to speak with Violet at times because of the memories she sparked from my own experience. There is an intensity, pain, and self-doubt that accompanies the work of urban teaching. At one of the most poignant times in her narratives, she explains her sense of duty to teach under "toxic" conditions. Her desire to take action never diminished even as she sought to leave urban education after experiencing intensive evaluation pressure.

> *I am just so conflicted. (laughing) You know? About all of these things. I care very very deeply about everything. But it's just, it's not like* Freedom Writers. *I knew what kind of school I had. And they DO NOT HAVE IT… it makes me want to cry. They do not have it and they do not know what it's like and they are mad. They are mad at their teachers and they cannot trust and that's what's frustrating. And I, because it is like, "Here I am. I'm here for you." And I couldn't ever, like, bridge that. And I am not saying that I was perfect. I would get over-emotional, because you can't not get over-emotional when you have kids that don't trust you or are cussing at you or telling you you are racist if you want to discipline them. Or, you know what I mean, like they are seeing you through their lens, and I am seeing them through my lens of here let me, let me be the teacher that I know how- that I want to be. It WAS painful. (crying) I just want to cry. Because it just never happened. It never happened. (still crying) I just think… I just wish they could have it.*

Violet often repeated that she had insight into the knowledge and educational experience that was missing for her students. She stated in more than one way that resistance to her work as a teacher came not only from a punitive administration, but from the kids who resisted her instruction due to her outsider status and light skin color. The tension in her narrative was overtly racial and despite having a long term commitment to improve the educational equality in her school she was never really able to "walk over that bridge" to gain the trust of her students that would be so vital to their future success. By the end of her urban school experience, Violet felt not just defeated, but unsuccessful at remedying the biggest challenges of her job.

Jasmine. Jasmine's personal commitment to the community means that she frames students' success and her actions in a deeply personal way. She sees her work as an investment in the growth of a marginalized community. Her own success has buoyed her into believing that similar success is available for her students. She identifies with her students, not only through her struggle as a woman of color, but also as an alumni. She remembers clearly the community's lack of investment in her school and racism associated with educational inequality.

> *"…There were certain news articles about what was going on with [the school while I was there]. Maybe four or five people commented on social media about a report of rebuilding the school and they would say, "Oh, all those illegals that go [there], they don't deserve a new school".*

By our second interview, Jasmine said she tried to find the article and the comments that were blatantly racist and a motivation for what she felt and what she wanted to change for her students, but she could no longer find it online. This experience fueled her desire to return to her old high school and work.

> *I am lucky to be able to work with so many students that will one day be the leaders that we've been looking for in Southside OKC. And I don't think there are many other roles in the world that give you that kind of opportunity, to mold or shape students in either a really positive way or a really negative way. And when I am having really rough days at work, it's what I try to remind myself of. (laughs) Because I feel that so many of my students will say, "well, if I go to college" and I tell them "you cannot come in here and say "if" you have to say "when". Because if you say "if" then you are doubting yourself and putting a wall up to making your dream come true. And so I appreciate being able to tell them that they can do it because I feel like the education system, at least in my community, is a constant. You would just be constantly beaten down that you couldn't make it. And so I like being able to have that kind of control to say You can do it and don't let anyone tell you any different.*

For Jasmine, the ability to disrupt the cycle of poverty and use herself as a model for success contributes to all of her actions as a change agent. She continues her work with the students of her old neighborhood and focus her time and energy on the needs of her local community. Jasmine's passionate work is based, seemingly, on her emic status in her community, even if this status doesn't translate to the power structures inside the school itself.

Tulip. Tulip describes her job as fighting for the cultural needs of her students through the school system and in the community. One example is how her district aides her to educate teachers on Indian removal and the evolution from Indian Territory to statehood. This corrects misinformation and assists teachers in becoming more culturally sensitive in how they teach Oklahoma history. Even with constant education, she has to mediate the actions of the principals in various schools in the districts and the needs of their Native students. Through years of experience, Tulip skillfully uses her position's visibility for advocacy and as a teaching tool.

> *The state of Oklahoma, it's embarrassing that we don't require our teachers who are going to be teaching in our schools...if you're going to brag about having the state with the most native students in it…if they're going to brag about having the state with the most Indian education programs…[then] you need to also brag, that we train our teachers to know a basic knowledge about Oklahoma history, from the native perspective and what happened in the state.*

> *I'm in constant explanation to new principals, or new teachers, even new counselors, of the why. Why do you have to wear that [eagle feather to graduation]? Or - why do they have to be gone [to cultural event]? Or why do they behave this way? Or why [won't] grandma talk to me? You know? I'm in constant re-education.*

Tulip's professional role is multi-faceted, but is rooted in assisting Native families to thrive culturally and achieve academic success. Tulip's approach centers on culture and family which means, in her own words, she becomes like a mother to her students, their families, and her

staff. Her actions as an agent of change stem out of her personal relationships with the students and her desire to promote Native issues on national stage.

Peony. Peony, like Tulip has a doctorate in education. After teaching at the secondary level, Peony made her way into a career in higher education. It was talking about her coordinator position in a program preparing student teachers to work urban environments that she began to use the term “agents of change/”. Her employment currently engages her to turn white, largely female, student teachers from a “savior” mentality, as Jasmine mention, to instilling a sense of true community engagement. Her stories are positioned in two ways, one as a high school teacher and another as a professor and program director. Her explanation of how she is implicated in her current work serves as a good descriptor of the catalyst behind her actions.

> *I think part of that is when I came to the [preservice training] program, a lot of the candidates were coming in with the slight savior attitude. In our interviews they would say things like, "I just want to love on these poor babies." I'm like, "I want to love on them too. I love the babies, but," it was really, "I think I can," no one ever really said save, but “save people”, but that's the implicit message that comes across.*
>
> *I would have said the same thing at their age. In that I would have wanted to do it for the issues of justice but I might not have articulated it that way, but I think I would have said the exact same things. Knowing what I know now, feel like my coursework and stuff and things I've read and done, I just was like we really need to start shifting that attitude. It's totally understandable and acceptable that they come to us that way but we can't let that be the message in the program at all because then they're not going to have any longevity in the district and they're going to reinforce things.*
>
> *I think it's really important to know that they can't be an agent of change in the classroom or in the profession if they don't understand the historical context in which they are teaching. They come with this savior attitude because they don't understand the historical forces that have basically re-segregated [the city]. The history of the district,*

the history of the city, the state and this whole country. I want them to be able to be a teacher that can articulate their own, and envision their own, power as a teacher in a time when teachers feel very powerless. I think I felt powerful as a teacher because I saw myself as pushing back against the system and that helped me have longevity in the field. I feel like that will make them stronger, longer teachers, I think.

[The student teachers] read at least one Lisa Delpit book in the summer, "Other People's Children." ...I think there's a huge missing piece if they don't understand the context in which they're teaching or they have assumptions about the context in which they're teaching that are not legit. There's issues about culture and language and power and critical pedagogy and they're reading it right before they go into student teaching in an urban setting so it opened a lot of people's eyes and it was the beginnings of that conversation so I want them to be willing to think about those things and I have to do that too because I'm the white teacher so I have to model that with them and be really honest with them a lot.

Ultimately, Peony explains her personal reasons for insisting that urban teachers develop a community knowledge. Peony's discovery of her family's participation in segregation and suburb growth shocked and motivated her. Her family history depicted the struggle Oklahoma City had complying with school integration policies. At one point, she explains, that integration efforts in Oklahoma City failed because white flight left the district with no one else to bus. As a child, Peony remembers attending an elementary school in Oklahoma City that, a few decades later, is considered a low performing school with a high population of low income students.

Peony, in her narrative, expresses honest acceptance of her family's role in educational segregation. The long bus rides and the potential for a poorer educational future drove her family to the white suburbs along Oklahoma City's borders. Peony, while only speaking of it indirectly, sees her place in that history. A central component to all of her narratives is the navigation of racial inequality, historical and current, with the tension of being a white woman in an urban

district. She uses this tension as an impetus to shift the thinking of young white student teachers. She relates to these young women and provides an alternative way to teach in an urban environment while using herself as the model. It is also important to note that Peony's teaching experience came from the same school district in which she was raised.

> *[I want them to be] really strong in their instruction but also really serious advocates for the community and see that as part of the package of being a teacher in an urban district. It's never just the teaching. It's always all this other stuff and we cannot drop them off in these settings and say, okay, be a really good teacher and we'll give you a stipend and we'll give you some classroom management and focus everything on pedagogy and instruction and not help them to understand the historical forces that have created these conditions.*
>
> *I think when they start to see those bigger socio-economic issues and historical issues they become more invested, like there's more buy in from them about making a difference is a different phrase almost at the point. They all say, "I want to make a difference," but when you're doing it in the context of this larger segregation of urban poverty and all this other stuff, I think they feel like they have, that they're really improving whole communities instead of just their classrooms. I hope that that's what they're getting and I think some of that's coming out in our program.*
>
> *No one ever said that to me when I was becoming a teacher. It was always like, "do better" and "lesson plans". No one ever said to me "rise up", or whatever, so maybe it's good to get them even before they're student teaching, having that thought in their head, just planting that seed. So yeah.*

Peony utilizes her past and present, interpreted through a penetrating self-reflection, to inform her actions. Her focus on changing teacher preparation for a more equitable and just urban education is unshakable because it encompasses all aspects of her life. In our brief time together, I deeply identified with Peony's love of all things Oklahoman. So much was Peony's sense of

purpose and nostalgia that she named her son after Woody Guthrie. Peony's convictions and experience led to her clear cut sense of professional direction.

Rhetorical Turn III

Intentions and actions define this collection of narratives. The purpose of this grouping is to explore the actions of each of the women through their own words and their own perspectives which often provoked more questions than statements. Rather than an itemized accounting of their attempts, the following is a messy and complicated collection of what the women deemed to be important.

Violet. After a while, the pressure of the urban environment became personal for Violet. Violet internalized the needs of her students in a way that changed how she viewed herself and, therefore, became the impetus to create change within her classroom. Violet consistently struggled between feeling like failure as a teacher in the urban setting and returning every day to provide her student's with what she believed was the same quality of education she had had.

> *I've felt loads of responsibility and I have also felt like, because I haven't fixed these kids or I haven't had, you know, the kind of success that I want to have, maybe I'm not good enough. I don't even know, but like, whenever you asked, "Why did you stay?", I think it was because I felt like they deserve to have a decent curriculum and …You know sometimes the teachers, they reached this kind of silent agreement with the kids that, if you don't give us work that's too hard and don't challenge us that much we'll be nice and quiet. You know what I mean? So, you know if you challenge them you are going to have the fight. (laughs) It is like a constant fight and struggle. And so if they-they feel like there is something wrong if they don't get it right away… It's that if they didn't understand something they would say, "you are stupid, you can't teach" (laugh), they wouldn't just say, "hey, I don't understand" and now I kinda get that's what was happening".*

The discipline was so bad, you know, that the idea, to me, of, like, social justice (sigh) is just so…um, hard because the discipline was so bad. I mean, do you remember when I said that to you, like I was trying to teach, um, uh, um, To Kill A Mockingbird [yeah] and the kids, like, would not believe me about [the word "negro"]It is just like there is so much distrust is what I am saying, like, I am not, like, okay, like, they didn't have a problem with- well, they did have a problem with the N-word, but then when it came to the word Negro (drops voice), like, I had to explain to them "Okay, you guys, at that time that is what they wanted to be called" and the They were like "No one would want to be called that." Like that was worse than the- that was worse. And so they think I'm a racist. There is like a cultural thing and like this distrust. And so it's like, it is just hard to even describe. Like, when you try and discipline them, I'm racist. (laughs) You know what I mean? They couldn't even talk about justice issues when you have, like, distrust, you have, I mean, there's like, I gave them Black Boy, like, they loved that, but it couldn't be the only thing that I gave them [to read]. They liked it because his mom taught him to fight, she was like, locked him out and was like "you don't come back until you learn". [The students] felt that, like, that spoke to their experience, like, they have a HARD life. And like, if I'm talking about social justice that's not something that they are wanting, not all of them, but the hardest, the hardest cases, the most troubled by [inequality or injustice] they are tuned out to that stuff.

It's just like, [social justice] is a hard topic for me, like, I do tend to have literature that speaks to their experience, but also, also, I believe in giving them a curriculum that everyone else is going to have, like, they need to read Romeo and Juliet just like everyone else. When I am thinking about social justice, I am thinking okay, are we talking about curriculum, what kind of social justice are you thinking about? The kind that changes their lives? Like, the Freedom Writers thing. [It]stirs me up and gets me all emotional because the dummy principal [said] it was our fault that we aren't

changing all these kids, and it kind of gets me in knots because there is so much going on in that one classroom and there's so many different dynamics, like, there are the kids that respect you to let you talk to them about, like, social justice issues, um, and then there are the kids that are just there that if I say it, it is automatically suspect. You know what I mean? Because of who I am. And by that, I mean, a middleclass white person. And I believe that some of that could be changed if more of the teachers looked like the kids, you know, some of that could be changed, if there wasn't a revolving door of teachers. Some of that could be changed if their parents didn't have such bad experiences as kids with teachers, you know, because the parents come in there distrustful of teachers. It's like, it is like it is all messed up.

Violet's narrative is full of intentions and the thought she gives to creating a more socially just curriculum in her classroom. Throughout our conversations, she mentioned that her students did not trust her. She explained how she could work to build their trust for a semester only to see one wrong move dissolve her relationship with her class. Racial tensions and misperceptions frame her efforts to be a change agent in a difficult school. In Violet's narrative, her perceptions of her students and theirs of her represent the biggest roadblock towards creating equitability in education.

Jasmine. In the following section, Jasmine's narrative demonstrates the obstacles to creating change in an education setting, despite her lengthy experience in the community. Jasmine's narrative of professional interactions as an agent of change led her to question her own status as a minority woman. Through her specific examples of being the 'other' at work, she makes connections between her silence professionally, versus her vocal stance as a community leader. Furthermore, Jasmine's suspicion of power and authority in school spaces influences her to work and act in significantly different ways depending on the space she occupies.

I wouldn't say that I'm as vocal and I wouldn't say that I am as out there [as I was when I was doing Making HerStory], but it is because I need to figure out some kind

of balance and I really need to reflect and figure out how I want to do activism. And one of the strategic reasons is that it is my first year working [at this high school] and even if I am a community member and someone who grew up in that community, I know I have to tread carefully. And maybe I am a little too much paranoid, but even when I was an intern there I rarely ever said anything because I know that people in power can do some pretty corrupt shit and so I didn't want to let that hinder me from becoming a school counselor there.

I guess the main thing is that I want there to be that kind of authenticity to my cultures, to the work that we've done in Making HerStory, things like that. But I guess, in terms of the co-workers, now this co-worker is very interested in getting a women studies club or a cultural studies club going [in the school]. And this person has been working there for a number of years, so, and I know the way she frames this and how she looks. She can say certain things like that and for me, I have to be much more careful. Um, so it can be a little bit frustrating in that regard. That there is someone that's already done work in this kind of arena and did so in a really difficult environment. Yet, a white woman says it, and you know, it's accepted. Um, so those are the moments that it gets pretty frustrating for me in terms of what I can and cannot say because I know that other folks can things that I can't always say.

But, I was just thinking about that. How it is so easy for her to feel so free in saying (ah), whereas for me, I just feel like I have to be careful about navigating spaces. And maybe it's because I am a first year counselor but also it is because I am a woman of color and I know I look different from other counselors.

I think [my skincolor] definitely does make a difference…I mean, something I did tell my partner, I told him, I said, I feel like when I am at work they view me as white. Like they don't even recognize that I am Arab and Asian. Um, and then they are also all white… I don't know, I'm mixed, so sometimes I say, "Do I look white?". I ask my

partner that. He's like "no, you don't look white!" (laughs) But, sometimes I wonder if I do at work because it feels that way when I am in certain work spaces, which is really unfortunate.

When I am in the office space with them they will say very racist things. But, I didn't feel comfortable and I didn't feel safe to say anything because, of course, I'm in a space with white women. But then I think to myself, it's probably my duty to say something and now I'm not... And I know it is coming from a place of ignorance. And some of them are very very kind hearted. But, it still gets very frustrating to the point that sometimes I just have to close my door and not talk to some people for a while.

I think a portion of it is, of course, probably because they genuinely care. But there has got to be some white savior complex added into that. And, I guess that I always think of Paulo Freire and how he talks about false generosity. I feel like that so often. In certain situations, like, there is no depth to the woman wanting the cultural studies program. It is because it will be a pat on your back. There is no depth to the understanding what it means and the importance of it. Or there is like a false understanding of it. There's not a real desire to push yourself to fully understand why it would be important to do that.

I also mentioned Making HerStory and creating that project there. I just mentioned it briefly, because there was a student who came into my office who identifies as LGBTQ, as having difficulty at home and so I mentioned, "Oh, so I used to run a program where we had a lot of LGBTQ youth, and", um, she was in a space, and I said "you know, I've been thinking about bringing it here" And she said "oh", and you could tell there was a little bit of off-ness to it and later on she came back into my office and said, "if you do it, the counseling staff would hopefully be able to a part of it, um, and be able to support you and be in on those facilitations or whatever" And she asked if I would be okay with that and I just kind of framed it as, you know, we have former

members who are going to take over and it would really be their decision. It was formed by women of color and to be a staple, because while I think there aren't a lot of women in power there is even less women of color in power and I think it is so important for our students to see people who look like them in those positions. Um, yeah, it is really complicated.

Throughout Jasmine's narrative, she struggles with issues of race and her role in her new job. She questions why she acts differently in an educational space than she did as a community leader. Her actions, since becoming a professional educator, appear to be limited by real and perceived challenges from the school structure.

Tulip. In addition to re-education and advocacy, Tulip's part in removing a redskin mascot from a local high school in her district made her famous (or notorious, depending on the person) in Oklahoma and among the national anti-mascot movement. Her narrative about the experience explains how a routine report from her department to school board meeting in her district turned into an impromptu motion and vote to remove a racist term as a mascot. Tulip's sense of the experience is infused with a belief of the guiding power of God and the strength of the Indian people around her.

I'm an advocate for our students, I'm an advocate for our parents, I'm an advocate for our parents, I'm an advocate for our program at the district level, I'm an advocate nationally for urban kids, state wide for urban kids. I don't have a problem with being the voice or being the person to say it. I'll ask that that hard question, I'll make it feel uncomfortable. I'll bring the topic that no one wants to talk about to the forefront. I will do it. So I feel like people might think about me and they'll be like, (Tulip makes a funny evil voice) "Oh, you're Tulip. You're the one who was in charge of all this mascot change." And stuff like that. They don't know the history of how it even came about, I really wasn't the person who said, red skins [are] horrible. (makes funny evil voice again) "Let's go parents, let's take this thing on it on!" I didn't do that.

What I did do, is I put pieces in place so that our parents have a voice. I put pieces in place so that administrators would hear not only from our parents but nationally what this terms means and then I WAS the voice at the school board meeting which ultimately changed it. I wouldn't have been at that school board room had it not been for our parents talking at a national forum when DC [Indian education representatives] were here. I wouldn't have … had it not been for our associate superintendent who is now our superintendent being in that room at that time. That was not my doing. That is God. You know what I mean? That's all timing, that's all timing. And so she heard that and she was like, "Okay, tell me more. Why do we have this as our mascot? What does it mean?" So I explained it to her and she's like, "Okay, that's not okay."

So, it went to the cabinet, and to the board of executive directors who sit at this table, who happened to be at that meeting. Again, timing. Again, right place, right time. They're like, "Oh my God, I'm so embarrassed." They didn't know. Then it came to board and really, I was supposed to talk about the outcome of the national forum listening session but instead I used part of the time to talk about the mascot issue. I will be the person to say it, but really try not to be the face of the change. I pushed one of our parents, because to me stuff like that has to come from the community. I'm an employee, I want to keep my job. I'm supporting the district, but I'm also supporting the school board and I'm supporting our parents.

And so I really push our parents to take the lead and they did happily with kind of our backing. But still, the day came when the alumni were furious, and were cussing people out and in people's faces, and probably the first time my staff has seen … I have a young staff, they saw overt racism. [The alumni] were asking that day "Who's this Tulip? I want to talk to her. It's all her fault." Ugh. I was in there with the other people and then I came out. And by the time I came out it was a little bit diffused. The media had gotten a

hold of those people who were irate and so they'd rather talk to the media than me. I was just concerned about my staff. I was just like, "No, it's not okay for you to get in her face. She's like 25 years old". I was so happy that my staff didn't go off, back. [My staff] really maintained themselves because they're not, they haven't had years of experience, and they haven't ever dealt with public overt racism like that. It was really crazy, it was just something that my generation and people younger than me because I'm 41, I've never experience the civil rights era. That was my, that was my father's era. That was … and from that, my husband explained it best.

When we were in a school board meeting, I always tell this story, it was so crazy. It was so jam packed with Native people. First of all, social media had a lot to do with it and secondly there was no vote [scheduled]. Nobody knew they were going to vote; I don't know why Indian country showed up that day, but they did. They were all there; people not even in our school district were there. Our parents [in the district] were like, "Come and support. We'll see if the board makes a decision." It just totally got, I don't want to say, blown out of proportion, but…there was nothing on the agenda that said that the board is going to decide on this mascot. There is no language like that whatsoever; all it was is that they are going to talk about the results of the listening session. That's it.

So I did the results, the room is jam-packed. They make the vote, it's really emotional. The school board member, X, who made the motion to eliminate redskins as a mascot immediately, and that word [immediately] is really important. He is Comanche but he's not identifiable Comanche so his voice was shaking and he was really emotional, and then one [school board member] that we thought was going to tear us up because he's from that [high school district], he represents that community or those that live in that area, was this old white man and we're like, "Oh God, here he goes." He's going to be like, "This is stupid or we need to keep our tradition, we honor you guys." and all the regular arguments. But he didn't, he did the opposite. He did his research. I was so

proud of him. He did his research; he talked about our graduation rates, our dropout rates. I was like, "Good job! Excellent work!" I was really proud of him. So everyone was holding their breath, they were like, "Let's motion." They seconded, they had a discussion and the votes came up and they were all lit up green and all have agreed and everyone cheered. It was crazy, people were hugging, people were crying, I was trying to stay low under the radar while staying close with my father-in-law, my husband. I was like, "Oh my Gosh, this is nuts." This was like, I don't know. It's so moving. My husband and I were talking about it on the way home. He was like, "The reason why it was like that," He said, "Is because is that our generation has never been a part of change like that (Tulip begins crying), we've never experienced change like that.

All you're doing is communicating the best way you know how. Why this is not okay. And you're challenging them to make the right decision because that's what I do. I just said [at the meeting], I challenge you. I challenge you to be … to be the change maker for, for our state. And they did, they didn't have any qualms about it. That's why everybody was there, they wanted to be a part of history. They wanted to be a part of change."

Tulip's experience as an educator agent of change was bolstered by the desires of the Native community. She was able to be the voice for a unified attempt to end the racist practice of using derogatory slang as a mascot name. Tulip's narrative positions her as being in the right place and at the right time and the moment mirrors an action of the Civil Rights Era.

Peony. Peony's story of resistance begins with her experience as a teacher and student group coordinator. Peony's social studies curriculum choices for high school students in wealthy suburb near a dense urban center ranged from *The Grapes of Wrath* to work by Howard Zinn. Peony also use readings that called into question patriarchal and heteronormative stances on history in order to "expand the narrative". As a teacher, her curriculum choices and resistance to the altering of that curriculum through district benchmark tests, forged her attitude of "it is easier

to ask for forgiveness than permission". Peony's core narrative revolves around her work with student clubs and her time aiding students to start a Gay Straight Alliance in her school.

Content-wise, I had a lot of opportunity to push that because I was in social studies and that was already kind of my bag. Then in terms of school, those structures in school, we started the Model UN club. We would do things that pissed off other teachers a lot…There's that and then the Gay-Straight Alliance started the last two years I was there. That was a big deal in Moore because there are no Gay-Straight Alliances in Moore after that point. This was like 2011, I guess.

It's a settled issue. The courts have ruled you have to let the gay kids organize a club. If you're going to have [student council] and FCA and all this other stuff… The district fought it. The administration just pushed it all the way back until April. They started lobbying in August and the district said, "Well, we have this bond issue coming up and so we don't want to say yes to it because we're afraid we'll lose our bond issue." They really delayed. Then the parents of the kids got a lawyer.

The principal called me in the office and closed the door and threatened me. He was like, "You need to look out, this is still a small town. Your reputation's at stake". I had been teaching forever by that point, for like 16 years. I was like, "I'm from this town. I'm from Moore. I was born nearby and lived here my whole life and graduated from school here and teach here and I don't care. I'm doing what I think and know is right for these students and what the law says that this district has to do."

It wasn't like ... he knew he couldn't threaten my job, but he was very religious. We had a really good working relationship, but he was very religious and really never hid that and really was demonstrative about faith in that school in ways that are probably illegal. That was like his whole thing. He said, "I'll be damned if I'm the administrator that lets this club happen on my watch." I was like, well, the courts…and the kids had the court rulings. The kids have the internet.

It was, like, this really weird year. Then finally they let the club organize. It was open to the public first meeting of the Gay-Straight Alliance in front of probably 100 people there. Most of them were there in a good way but they let it be known. They were like, "This is going to be an open forum and so we're going to let everyone talk." Because really there's only like ten kids that care enough to come to the meetings on a regular basis. They were like, "Anybody can come and say your piece, but the club's going to happen." So this huge turnout of teachers and students [showed up].

It actually was pretty cool because even by that point the administration was like, "We can't fight this anymore. We're going to get sued." Then the next year- the year after that the school district came in and said, "Well, if we're going to have the gay club, we're going to have two categories of clubs, student clubs and school clubs." School clubs have to do with curriculum and student clubs do not have to do with curriculum. Only school clubs can use the announcements or be on the website or have announcements on the intercom.

It automatically put all these clubs in with the gay club. The club I officially sponsored was the Asian American Society, which is a huge institution. There's a huge Vietnamese and Korean population there. We were in now those student club section. We were basically segregated with the gay kids and there were a handful of other clubs that weren't considered school clubs that were student clubs.

They did this because they didn't want the gay kids' club on the announcements or on the website. They didn't want anyone to be able to go to the school's website and click on the Gay-Straight Alliance. Then what it is, in my view, it's kind of divide and conquer. Then it pitted all these other kids, who were now mad at the Gay-Straight Alliance, because this new rule basically made it really difficult for us to conduct business. We would do like $8,000 worth of candy sales in the Asian club every year and I couldn't use the announcements or have the website. It made it really difficult for us (the Asian club), which

I think was the aim was trying to shut down the student clubs. I think it was penalty for ...for the gay kids organizing because most of the student clubs were like ethnically based. I mean there was like an anime club that was affected too. That was a difficult year. We pushed back against that. The sponsors of the student clubs were like, "We can't have this student club if you don't let us use the facilities and use the communication networks of the school to communicate with our members."

It was this huge back and forth for the second year and so we pushed back. Then eventually the district conceded. The third year they let student clubs start using the announcements and the website. [Then] they went in one day and just took us all off the website and didn't tell us that that was happening. It was really ridiculous. [The town] is like a small town in so many ways. It's huge. It's like a huge bedroom community but it's still kind of in the '50s, 1950s in a lot of ways. That, I really had thought things were getting better. Wasn't really expecting that level of crazy drama.

Throughout her narrative Peony was surprised when she faced issues with her principal and administration over student groups and her personal curriculum choices. One particularly funny story was her curriculum team's creative administration of district academic benchmark tests given as an indicator of state test outcomes. Her team was being forced to give tests that didn't measure the curriculum they taught and, ironically, had lower expectations than the results that team had produced over the last few years. It seems that her school led the state in the end of year test scores, but no amount of resistance to poorly thought through district policy protected her from onslaught of standardization from the top down.

Rhetorical Turn IV

The conflict within the narratives stems from multiple sources: school administrations, students, education reform mandates, academia, and the political and social spaces saturated with conservative ideology. These narratives examine the various spots of tension and resistance to those described conflicts.

Violet. Violet experienced a high degree of stress while teaching in a failing urban high school. She experienced tension with her students, the administration, and herself for failing to meet the expectations based on teacher-savior stereotypes that she initially resisted. Additionally, Violet's fear and negotiation of conservative ideology reveals the influence it has on her life.

> *I mean, the discipline is, was, so out of control. I mean, the year before I left I had a kid threw a book at me. And like, uh, it was stressful. I was waking up at 3:30 in the morning because of the administration. Because I had six people, SIX different people telling me what our word wall should look like. So, I mean, it was just like we had all of the Marzano people in there. It was very very stressful because we were a 'needs improvement' school. [We] met our goals for the last year that I was there. Um, so I feel like I did a good job, but I don't know. It is just that the whole environment is so stressful and I didn't realize it until I got out because it was like being, it was like being an abused wife, you know? It felt like it was just a battle to go in and to believe every day that I am going, that I have to… my belief was that I'm going to teach my curriculum and that I'm going to do that. I think that part of why I left is that I stopped believing that anything could change. At least within that system and how it was working. So…and I was too stressed.*
>
> *I think, like, and then part of me, uh, part of me felt like once I stayed there long enough I started, like, believing what they were saying, that I wasn't good enough of a teacher. Like, because I hadn't fixed those kids I must not really be a very good teacher. I've felt loads of responsibility and I have also felt like, because I haven't fixed these kids or I haven't had, you know, the kind of success that I want to have where all these people want us to have, you know, maybe I'm not good enough. I mean, I did see, like, in my Gates-MacGinitie reading scores, I saw a bunch of achievement. Like my kids would have double, like, two years' growth. More than any of the other teachers in my building.*

I still felt that way because of the messages… 'if we had better teachers, if you guys were better', you know, it is just, it is pervasive.

I got a shout out in the staff meeting, but even so, I had six people coming in telling me how to do my word wall and literally expecting me to change it. Even so, I had, you know, uh, in addition to 45 min formal evaluations were horrible, one of them I was crying, I mean, horrible. Like, it is this regimented thing where you do an opening, a word time, a closure, uh, like, very regimented. You are supposed to have a kid present the closing [statement about the lesson], don't do it, like, why is the kid not doing the closing deal, uh, if they {the kid} don't refer to your objective a certain number of times. I mean, it's like, they are going down the 64 items of the Marzano list, and you know they think you should get all 64 items in one evaluation, but, you know, they are going to point out what you are doing wrong. Like, I had my own scale that I had [as part of the Marzano's assessment] I, um, I worked it out, actually with the lady who was the Marzano trainer. We worked on it together. And then I didn't have my title for my scale, I mean, she didn't talk to me about a title for my scale, but I didn't have a title for my scale so I [was given] a zero for "learning objectives". So that go into your evaluations. It was just a gotcha. It's like they are looking for something to prove that this is why our kids are failing. So that they can fire you at some point. That's what I felt like. So, that, what I felt like was, okay, they spent like, we got one of those Race to the Top grant and we got 3 million dollars (laugh) and we still had an "F". Um, they are not going to tell you that you are doing a good job. It's just the absurd.

I think sometimes I get bogged down with this ideal that I have in my head that, um, things are going to be perfect. You know, or that I am going to figure out all of these problems. I am going to do it right this time (laughing). I have these ideals in my head that I beat myself against and then on the other hand. I get annoyed with people, like, having these higher than necessary ideals about what needs to happen. So I just realized

that I'm worried when I hear other people having these platitudes about what is supposed to happen. But then, I do the same thing and that's when I get frustrated with myself.

Violet's tension with the students and administration were at the center of her daily teaching practice. However, in the backdrop of her narrative was the recent presidential election and the overall conservative environment that rejects, or at the very least complicates, promoting social justice or democratic education classes within her classroom. Violet was extremely worried about being overheard speaking about her experiences and her political views by students or parents of the high school where she worked. In hushed tones and whispers at a local, crowded, coffee shop, Violet explains her political leanings and the fallout of the 2017 presidential election in the conservative suburban high school where she now teaches and what this has taught her about her time in urban education.

I negotiate in Oklahoma, um… I would say not- being careful not to speak my mind about- I am careful to be really bland in terms of, like, politics. That is true that I didn't have to be when I was in OKC. I tried to be. After Obama won, I felt like it was my job to be, like, neutral. And they got mad at me because they thought I voted for Romney, Bush, or whichever. Yeah, they got mad at me. I mean mad at me and I'm like, No, I'm trying to be neutral, it's my job to be neutral. I told them that I didn't want to tell them who I voted for because I had this ideal of what a teacher should be like my whole life. I think that they didn't understand where I was coming from. They had not seen that. Like, and, so they didn't know how to take me sometimes. You know what I mean?

So I had a kid say that he was going to get in someone's face after the last [2016 presidential] elections. I said, I told him to SIT DOWN (laughing) and this is the kid that normally passive and on his phone all the time and he's, like, unglued because he is so excited after the election. And he is like "I'm going to get in his face and tell him he was wrong and Hilary lost and tell him I told him so!" I had to cut off all political talk in my room. ALL of it.

You can talk about prejudice and get little things in [at my suburban school]. You can talk about it (she begins to speak very, very, softly) but you have to be- you have to word it in ways that, like, let's everyone- without making anyone feel excluded who might be a Trump supporter when he is talking about wanting a wall built. You know what I'm saying? I had to shut down the kids saying [to a student of color] "well, we won't see you anymore, right?" Every single class after the election.

Violet has many different emotions and responses to how she sees her actions in a conservative environment. In the urban Oklahoma City school, her sense of duty that caused her to behave in a way that she deemed "neutral" created a rift between her and her students. Neutrality, in an environment that was intrinsically unjust, from her reflection, is not a reasonable or responsible stance when your student's lives are in great stress. It seems that her desire to be respectable was in direct conflict with the emotional response her students demanded, who wished for their white teacher to acknowledge the election of the first African American president. The result was miscommunication and faulty perceptions that she had voted for someone other than candidate or President Barak Obama.

In her recent move to a predominately white suburban school, she found an opposite tension. In order to speak about social justice issues, she had navigate class discussions where her students may support strict nationalism and question teaching about diversity or multiculturalism. With the 2016 presidential election she found that she was on the other side of her student's political beliefs. This time, she held onto her view of neutrality to become the arbiter of hateful speech in her class. Whether or not her opinions coincided with her students, Violet felt as if she were holding onto an ethical principle by remaining neutral in her Oklahoma classrooms. She felt that her actions would hold her beyond reproach from the powers operating outside her classroom, even if she felt internal conflict.

I think I'm liberal, sometimes I think I'm a moderate, but, like, a moderate democrat. But then sometimes I am like, it just depends. I think that I am more on the

moderate side of democrat, you know what I mean? I think that people should talk to each other. I don't like this idea of nothing getting done because no one can talk to each other. So that's where I'm a moderate. I think that people should be able to listen to each other's views and be respectful and get some things done. Oh, I guess right now, I guess I do [hesitate to say that I'm a democrat out loud]. It is so weird. I don't know why. I guess, I guess, I am just so used to not, you know? It is hard to say out loud. In Oklahoma, it is.

After the election of Donald Trump, she broke down in tears fearing her loved ones who voted for him were prejudiced against racial or ethnic groups. She spoke about struggling to remain neutral in her relationships and for the first time having to not take personally the sense of isolation that comes from being one of the few people she knows that claims to be a Democrat is a red state. The conservative dogma demands surveillance and punishment of teachers not seeking to remain neutral. Conservativism also, I would assert, requires abhorrence of radical departures from feminized notions of self-promotion or uniqueness. This rhetoric was woven throughout her narrative, especially when she tried to reconcile her own beliefs and actions with those who claimed the banner of "social justice teacher".

Jasmine. Jasmine's narratives are spontaneous and unorganized in a truly dynamic way. She speaks of conflicts and tensions from her time as a community facilitator and director of *Making HerStory*, then her time as a graduate student, a counseling intern at her alma matter and finally as an counselor at the same school. Her experiences have largely led her to question her sense of agency and voice in the different spaces she occupies.

It is unfortunate because sometimes I really do question why I am so silent in certain spaces now. And I can't quite figure out why I am that way… I think maybe also academia and my program had something to do with it because it was very white and the times that I did speak out, it didn't go well. Um, but also because I was the intern at this school. So, yeah, I do think that was another difficult part about working there and

something that I question when I took the job. Because, you know, they were so kind. They were the ones who vouched for me to get the job. As well as the principal, and someone I knew, there's a lot of gratitude there. And so, it's a difficult tension…it's a difficult complexity…

Race and power discourses pervade Jasmine's narrative on silence and action. When reflecting on her work within a conservative context, Jasmine sees herself as having changed over the last few years not because of the political climate in Oklahoma, but because of her new professional identity.] For her, speaking about conservativism conjures up an aura of otherness that continually makes her an outsider in her new job. This is a new experience for her. Jasmine's navigation of this insider/outsider status shifts as her role in the community shifts. The bureaucracy of education, including a hierarchy of authority, as well as racial insensitivity of her co-workers, appears to be the biggest obstacle to her using her skills to create change in her new job. While she debates her own reasons for self-silencing, is important to note that she connected, without pause, conservativism to heterosexual white males in the state. This adds another influential discourse to her lived experience as a women educator.

My current political views? I still define myself as a progressive. As someone who believes in equality for all people. Whether you're trans, gender nonconforming, whether you're Palestinian, whether you're Jewish. I would probably define [conservativism] as…the first thing I can think of is white. I think of that. I think of male even though I'm sure there are women who also are conservative. I oftentimes think of white men when I think of conservatism. Whether that's in Oklahoma or anywhere, I think of that, white, straight, male. I also think in Oklahoma, as in anywhere, I think it comes from a place of ignorance. Finances and things of that nature, I still don't agree with conservative folks. I feel like its white male I guess.

Jasmine's views of conservativism and resistance were threaded with views of racial otherness brought about by her experiences as a woman of color. This brief narrative is all I could

get her to say about her views on politics and the impact of conservative discourses on her life. She delineated another type of otherness, white males, and then moved on to other topics. Her narrative highlights how political ideology can be seen as representing opposition to equal rights or access for marginalized groups. Conservativism is not just the binary opposite to her beliefs. It has a larger meaning. Conservativism, for her, is stigmatized by a faulty sense of morality that runs opposite to those seeking progressive change and is taken as a personal affront to her work. Interestingly, the way she self-identifies is equally complicated.

Tulip. Unlike Jasmine, Tulip uses precise political language to identify herself, calling herself a Democrat and "very liberal". She was able to articulate her experiences of conservativism through stories of her work. She relates conservativism not to a majority group, a sense of othering or a line to navigate to remain professional. Instead, she articulates conservativism as a vague impediment to progress for Native children. The result is that as an operative in Oklahoma, she is inhibited by our colonial history and political ideology that supports individualism and competitiveness. Conservativism that promotes anti-affirmative action and anti-multicultural approaches to education is in direct conflict with Tulip's work.

> *I think here in Oklahoma what's frustrating for me is, I think if I were to do this work in Arizona, I would be supported and championed by the tribes. I think here in Oklahoma there's a couple of issues that are difficult for change in education but change in terms of policy at the state level and it's … our tribes don't work together, that's huge. They do not move as a powerful one force, if they did, they would be a powerhouse the way that they can swing a vote in Arizona or New Mexico. We don't do that here. The other issue I personally have dealt with is resistance from, how can I say this? I'm just going to say it. When I don't know how to say something I just say it.*

Tulip views Oklahoma's political climate differently after her experience on a national board. She perceives obstacles coming from the historical and current attacks on tribal sovereignty and less obvious assimilation practices. These obstacles prevent tribes from

organizing to gain a political presence that could impact state legislature. The problem, she notes, aside from a state political climate that prevents tribes from working together, is the organizing of Indian Country on an individual level. It is particularly interesting that, despite voting records or party affiliation data in Arizona, she compares two states with large Native populations.

So that work that I did for four years [on a national board for Indian Education], three years, it made me understand how it impacts Indian education. But it more so made me understand how I can communicate and talk about politics to my [school] parents, who are uninvolved. Who don't vote. Who don't care. I really try to tell them that ...

I guess when I'm dealing with the Indian community, I've been really ... I think about my grandma a lot because she was not an English-speaking person. She learned how to speak English but that wasn't her first language. So when I would have to tell her about things, I would have to put it in a context that she understood. A lot of analogies. Or a lot of reframing.

So I felt like, when I got on the [national education] Board, and I saw how everything has a trickle effect, I could come back to what I do every day and use that same kind of communication method with our family members. Because you can't tell them to vote if they don't understand why it's so important. You know what I mean?

So then I got off that Board, and I started to really think about the political climate here in Oklahoma. I think I talked a little bit about how our tribes don't move [with] one function. They don't move as one body. I think that hurts us. But what does move as one body is our metro directors. Our Oklahoma City metro directors. So we work together, like a well-oiled machine, to make sure that our urban kids are represented. Because they don't fall under tribal programs.

Tribes will just talk for themselves and they will just talk for their tribal representatives. But if you're not in their jurisdiction, you're not on their radar. So we're never, ever gonna be on their radar unless they start ... Unless the tribes, together, start

functioning that way. Now, it's become even more important that I follow Indian education. My political views, I guess, are really directed towards how the administration, the Trump administration, and Congress, how they push money and how they push the education part of that budget, I guess. That's kind of really what I follow.

Tulip's narrative of political ideology is influenced by her personal and professional experiences. She sees the Oklahoma from distant, wider perspective after working with other American Indian education professionals all over the country. She recounts at different times, how the tribes, in their isolation and misgivings, fail to unify to create change. In Tulip's narrative, she traces how of ideological discourses of power dramatically impact children and their families. She indicates that there is a never ending cycle of needing to operate in the political sphere to gain influence while that very sphere is culturally incompatible to many tribal people.

Peony. More strongly than the other participants, Peony claims to be "super liberal" and politically active. With a lot of humor and warmth she bragged that she knitted "like ten of those hats" for the Women's March in January of 2017. She participates in all types of protest rallies, as well as organizations with other like-minded people whose focus is social justice. Her narratives spend considerable time elaborating the social conservative side of her suburban home town where she spent most of her career. For Peony, conservativism in her local environment revolved around Christian influences in her school that dictated acceptable student behavior and affected her actions as an educator. The following narrative was her response to my asking if a woman of color could have done the things that she had done in her school to "expand the narrative".

Oh, not anymore. No way. She would've been playing the "black card". Like sometimes I was playing the "woman card", like, I had mutterings of that, you know. Because I'd spent a lot of time [teaching]about feminist history and we didn't have to, we just did and there were some guy students who were like, she's always talking about women, but there's no way. It's just like in that Peggy Macintosh classic when she lists all

of her white privilege. I can find a place to publish this article on white privilege without saying I'm playing the race card and there's no way a black teacher could've got away with half of what I got away with.

Maybe…I think [women of color] could push back in Oklahoma City. Probably more so, but not where they're the minority and not in a place like [my town] that even though it's changing, it's getting more culturally diverse, it's still very much socially conservative, politically conservative, like the Asians coming in are like a big deal… (in a conspiratorial tone) they're Buddhist.

Because the [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] was praising on the commons and they would wash each other's feet in the lecture center before school, like ritual feet washing, like Christian's foot washing things so lots of expressions of Christian religious transitions on campus which is totally legal, like it's student initiated and student clubs and they have every right to do that, but… then like, I tell my students all the time, let's start a student Buddhist association, see how fast people would freak out if you guys were chanting in the library commons, you know. We all knew that if they tried to do that it would go sideways.

At several points in our conversations, I felt that I failed to see her personal motivation in her narratives. Until I met Peony, each of the participants indicated a struggle associated with their decisions and actions as change agents. All participants, up until now, expressed extreme emotion in some way related to their actions. Interestingly, Peony spoke about being liberal, politically active, and pushing for alternative narratives in her history classes, but her reflections did not indicate tensions within her personal or professional life. Her upbeat attitude and explicit mission to make preservice teachers locally active agents of change seemed largely met without conflict. To continue exploring her sense of self, I asked her directly about the impact of the recent presidential election on her work. Other participants spoke about the impact of the election, either regarding the impact on the students they serve or how the outcome would change their

approach to politics in the coming years. Peony describes her immediate family as a political and her personal life as congruent with her professional life. She presents the success she has had as an agent of change as the result of "flying under the radar". I asked her specifically about her experience after the election, her response was more personal than her previous reflections.

> *I, personally, I canceled a class that week because I couldn't deal. I really had a hard time for a couple of weeks, but my students- and we talked about it a little in class, but the other thing I think that helps is I try not, I am political, but I'm not overtly political when we talk about things so I'm always like, "I don't want to get political but let's talk about race", and so ...*
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> *I think they know that [I am a progressive liberal], but we don't ... we talked about the election in foundations in ways that it was going to affect education policy and the schooling of immigrant children so we talked about it in those terms, but I'm quite sure I have Trump voters in my classroom and we have to mean it when we say everyone's entitled to an opinion and everyone's entitled to vote for crazy assholes if they want to., I don't know. I really personally struggled, but I didn't really have any students that indicated to me that they were struggling.*

Peony's views of negotiating conservativism as a change agent took the form of a fear based on recent hires to the Trump administration. The following narrative indicates her move from accepting the balance of influence from different political ideologies to a fear of a trickle down influence of national politics with a conservative approach.

> *My biggest fear is that the Right will harness the mechanisms of government in such a way that even when the majority of people don't agree with their program, they will have gerrymandered and privatized and make it impossible for the machinery to shift, for that pendulum to shift. You know. I've always told my students, I'm very comforted when I study US history, because you see these shifts and it's never permanent and things shift and move and it's just like, the way it is. And 100 years ago, American*

teachers were like, what do I do with the English language learner? You know, everyone's talking about the same thing, but now I'm worried that that pendulum might not be able to shift back because there's so many structural changes that are being locked down and that concerns me. I do, I'm really worried about public education as an institution for the greater good. Being privatized and named and blamed. So, I talk about a lot of that in my classes.

Peony, interestingly, speaks without fear or distain for the socially conservative ideology or racial and religious divisions of her hometown. Instead, she talks about conservative influences as a factor to be navigated to obtaining her overall plan. The larger, emotional response of her narrative came from her fear that national politics will alter public education, as a whole, impacting the institution and her functioning locally. Again, conservative ideology is an entity dealt with directly, like an acknowledged but unwelcomed visitor. Peony makes it look easy to negotiate and deal with these local conservative discourses as a member of the community she was making change in. As a coordinator of an urban education training program, her larger view on education has become slightly rattled, causing her to resist the worry that the pendulum won't swing back to the other (progressive) direction.

Rhetorical Turn V

Violet. Violet gave every bit of herself to enhance the poor curriculum provided and challenge the expectations of her students at a failing school. Despite her work, my time with Violet produced many interesting discussions about what kind of action qualified a person to be an agent of change or a social justice teacher and whether she, specifically met those qualifications. While she readily acknowledges that her work to grow the curriculum provided to the students in a school that had the highest form of governmental oversight, she determined that her personal actions were largely a failure and therefore unlike the other people she saw applying social justice terms to their career. While Violet never felt like she was able to completely bridge a cultural or racial gap between her and her students, she did identify with a sense of

marginalization based on social class. Towards the end of our time together, Violet explained that she had been tracked into lower level classes in middle school despite having A's like her friends. Her understanding of the inequity in her own life is because she was from a poor family who failed to demand any different of a school in an affluent town.

> *I have never, ever would have thought of [what I do] as social justice, partially because the one teacher who used that term was so arrogant, and um, and the other people who used that term were the Teach for America people. That's the only time I have heard that term is Teach for America or this guy that I just felt like, he was arrogant. So, it's like, that's where I go. It's just like, it is a hard topic for me.*
>
> *And I think that when I would hear, like, that one teacher Mr. C., um, talk about social justice, I'm like… bullshit. Because I felt like he was just saying something just to sound good. You know? And maybe he did. Maybe he said stuff, but I also know every year a kid would punch him. I don't know, he would just get into it. He is very mild mannered, but he, you know, sometimes kind of obnoxious, you know? Sometimes if you, if you ask a kid to do something they don't want to do…Like I have kids blow up on me, you know? Like, seriously. I mean, like, sometimes I would be like "go ahead. Let's see how far that gets you." (laughs) I'm not saying that's a reflection on social justice, I'm just saying, like, I think that it's like Maslow's hierarchy of needs.*
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> *I think that I am not really giving you the answers you want because I am, I am just so conflicted. And I think that for me, I think of it as part of my personal journey rather than, uh, that's how I put it in my framework is I think of it as part of my personal journey through what I learned. You know what I mean. Instead of, like, instead of what they learned from me? Cause I don't know if I will ever know that? So, I just think about what I learned about myself and what I learned as a teacher.*

Violet struggled through our conversations by trying to simultaneous explain her experience and grieve. She cried at several points when explaining that she couldn't meet

students' needs for various reasons. By her frame of reference, teachers who made a difference are like the ones portrayed in movies, but the reality is that her students' trust was hard to win and easy to lose. She was more than horrified at their educational condition. She was committed to fixing it in any way she could prompting her to stay in a difficult teaching position for many years. She assumed that arrogance made others claim to be "social justice teachers", but she repeatedly pointed out that their experience was ultimately the same. As Violet ruminated about her career, she decided, ultimately, that this had to be a story about her and not her students. The work she did was part of a personal journey that was tangible to her since she had no knowledge of if she had helped changed anything for her students. While I considered that she may have only offered such a candid insight into her experience as a favor to me, she ultimately told me that while she didn't think her story would be of much use, the telling of it had made a difference to her.

Jasmine. Jasmine's diverse roles make her insight into the terminology of educational activism particularly unique. She is suspicious of rigid categories, academic egoism, and nebulous or trite definitions of activism or social justice. Therefore, her comfort with certain terminology being applied to herself varied. In her discussion of labels, she reveals that categories can be used by members as self-promotion or a tool to critique or police other members of a group.

> *I think that "activist" is more of a mainstream word that I've heard thrown around. It's complicated because I don't even feel comfortable saying "Hi, my name's Jasmine and I'm an activist". Even when I was doing activist work I would never start like that because it felt, I don't know it feels like something that you shouldn't proclaim, but it should just be known, I guess, which is an odd way of looking at it.*
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> *I don't think, for me, I don't think necessarily is a bad thing to be thought of in that kind of way. It can be a positive thing. But, I guess… I guess I would just, I don't know, this whole terminology thing for me, even in activist spaces or whatever you want*

to call them. I feel like if you don't have the right terminology people can turn off. Like, they don't want to listen to you or they will think you are not as reputable, um, I don't always appreciate [that] either. And I think in academia it can be the same way. You have to have this specific language, "microaggression", all that kind of stuff. I understand that we have to utilize the right terminology but, I think if it's a means to tell people in a very unloving way that you are not doing good enough, uh, I don't know if I necessarily agree with that.

I would probably say that I've done certain activist work in the past. I probably would frame it in that type of way. I think that one of my issues and maybe not necessarily other people's issues would be, I would imagine certain people saying "well, what has she REALLY done to change things or help to improve things". Maybe I wouldn't necessarily think about people thinking negatively about me I would think more about them questioning what has she really done in the community.

I think because maybe I could be considered an activist. Maybe I don't necessarily use it in my vocabulary to describe myself. I guess for me, I think we ended up saying "lead facilitator" and I framed it as I was a facilitator. Of course, I think the other issue is, activists can be very ... They have to go to protests, they have to go to rallies. Versus, I'm in my community and I'm having conversations with young people. Can't that be considered activism too? For me, I just never fully felt comfortable stating it because I feel like by stating it, maybe it feels as if it doesn't make it as authentic. Now yeah, I'd like to think of myself as an, I don't know, activist in the education system. To be quite honest, I don't really know if I'm doing that much work that's beneficial in certain ways.

I guess one day I could look at it as maybe it can be ... I guess it feels like, activist feels like it has to be something many people proclaim you are. It has to be written in the history books. Or herstory books, or whatever. Sometimes it does feel that

way though. Sometimes I think 15 years from now, or 30 years from now, or 40 years from now, will people really remember Making Herstory? Will it be something that people remember? To be quite honest, it might not be something that's remembered. Does that really mean that I can tell my grandchildren that I did activist work? Quite possibly not. I guess that's kind of how I view it sometimes. It has to be somewhere. Which is unfortunate, because in a lot of ways there are a lot of educators that are doing such phenomenal work that don't oftentimes get that praise or won't get that praise 50 years from now. And rarely do in the way they should be.

I think there can be multiple different answers and I think it is true that activism oftentimes is set in a very limited box. I can't say that I haven't been someone who's thought, who hasn't thought similarly and the idea that some folks that maybe said they were activists. I thought in my head, "Well, what are you really doing?" Which isn't the greatest thing either.

Jasmine view on claiming the title of activist as inauthentic is mirrored in Violet's views on self-proclamation as arrogance. In our meetings, I didn't hesitate calling Jasmine an activist, but as she explained the potential minefields in activist or academic spaces where using the correct or most fashionable terminology was in conflict with the authenticity that she was seeking. She also mentioned two other requirements related to the identifier, activist. First she believed that meaningful change must be achieved and visible to future generations. She questions whether work must be visible to be considered important when she considers her new role or the work done by other activists. This narrative is more definitive, but similar to Violet's views. Finally, Jasmine questioned whether activists could live full lives or hold jobs to support their families. In her narrative she questions whether an activist can take any time off from the work to take care of personal issues. This was particularly important to Jasmine because she pulled back from her community work after losing her father. Jasmine, as well as the other participants, noted the personal sacrifice and toll required for sustaining their efforts of change.

Tulip. Tulip's experience shares the drawbacks to being the public face of change in a conservative environment. She finds that while she must defend herself from community members and a few elders who feel her actions have been too public and ego driven, those closest to her validate and inform her identity.

> *I feel my main job is advocacy. My main job is to be the voice, to be the squeaky wheel, to be the champion, to be … I'm going to curse. To be the bitch for the Indian community to outsiders or to our administration, to other community members, to Oklahoma City, to whoever is going to challenge or wonder or question about our kids, our programs, our community, our Indian people, how we do things, why we do them, because it's very complex. There's different layers and we have, as a native person we have to consider a lot of things. We have to really always and it's not fair but that's just how it is.*
>
> *I always, I always like the word advocacy. I would say that my job is to … A person's voice to me is so powerful and so how to teach students on how to have a voice and an opinion and to express is, is really hard to do and for our Indian people here and Native people here. If you don't feel like … and I feel like this from our parents. I feel like they, they think that the school district dictates to them how they're child is going to learn and that they don't get say. If your child is suspended, he's just suspended and you can't do anything about it. It's not true, that's not true. If you feel like your child is being punished for the wrong reason or in the wrong way, then you have to be the advocate. If you can't do it, I will do it for you but you have to help me. I don't know your child, you know your child but you explain to me and I will try to be your advocate and I will try to be your voice.*

Like Jasmine, Tulip acknowledges that there is a consequence for acting as an agent of change in professional spaces either among older Native Americans or the non-Native community. In professional settings she shoulders racism on to protect her staff and navigates the

envy and anger of conservative elders. Within her significant support system, this outspokenness could possibly label her as "activist" with a negative connotation. However, she finds that among her extended family, she is viewed, not as a radical or angry woman of color. Instead, she is seen as joining a generational struggle for sovereignty and equality. Tulip's narratives delineate different experiences in different communities. In her professional life, she is the "bitch" for the Indian community, by claiming space for Native students in a sometimes hostile educational environment. Despite her strong wording, she doesn't see her advocacy as overt or as significant as elders those who fought for Native rights during the Civil Rights era. For Native families in the district, she is the mother and sister, directly confronting families that struggle. However, when navigating the bureaucracy of her job she educates diplomatically. Within these roles there are significant shifts in how Tulip perceives she should act and how those actions are received.

> *There is resistance or … I don't know if the word is envy from my male, older, Indian counterpart who colleagues. I don't even want to call them colleagues, I don't want to call them colleagues because I don't work with them but they're in the same realm, they're in education, they are … and they, I can feel their … like they despise me. Maybe I'm paranoid but I can feel the energy from them, whenever I walk into a room, I feel like they roll their eyes, "Here she comes again, she's the little miss know it all."*
>
> *Also, it really bothered me, that really for my own people to come up to me and say that [I shouldn't have fought to end the mascot]. That really bothered me and I was mad after that. I was really mad. And then sometime had went on and I was at a … of all things, I was at an annual Native American church meeting and we're in the kitchen because I was helping cook. So all the ladies are in the kitchen, cooking and whatever and … I walked in and they said "Oh, there she is. There's that AIM fighter." And I said, "What! What are you talking about?" And they said, "We heard you were being AIM."*
>
> *I was like, "I'm the furthest thing from AIM you'll ever see." I said, "I am not AIM material. AIM would reject me." Because I'm not like hardcore activists, whatever,*

and they were like, "Well, that's what we heard." And I was like, "What are you guys talking about?" So they were at a parent committee and the lady who got mad at me was there and she was like, "Well that Tulip thinks she's an AIM member and she's doing this and she's doing that." And she's talking to all those these other parents in these school district and I was like, "Damn that lady." And then I said, "I'm not AIM you guys." And they were just laughing and I said, "I mean, who here is AIM?" and they all raised their hands. And these ladies are all elderly. I was like, "What?" They all raised their hands and I was [surprised] because I only know these ladies as my in- laws. I know them as; grandmas, I know them as moms and I was like, "What?" They said, "Oh yeah." Then they started exchanging all their stories … it was so crazy. All their stories of when they would protest and they would … and that's how they did it back then. ***They did, like, outright****. They all assembled in caravans somewhere and protested and so one aunt was like, "Oh, yeah." She was like, "I've protested so many times and I did this and I did that." And I was, like [shocked]. "And that one time, we were at the DC and we did this and the other time …" so they were just exchanging stories. I was like, "See, I'm not AIM." It was so cute though. It was so … I feel like they were teasing but they were also saying, "It's okay, we've all. We've all done our share of advocacy work".*

Tulip's narrative displays a shift in the use of terminology. In this short piece she indicates utilizing strategic terminology and actions as the situation demands. In a short amount of time, Tulip referred to herself as acting as an advocate, a bitch, and a member of a community. In this case, Tulip's narrative, like Jasmine's, indirectly describes the limitations of labeling educator activism.

Peony. Peony, an indefatigable resistor and actor, knows who she is and what she stands for with complete clarity. Likewise, Peony views the labeling of oneself an "agent of change" as useful for the process of becoming an agent of change. Her narrative examines the use of labels as tool for agency.

I would be okay with being called a change agent. An agent of change. I think that I agree [that the terminology is difficult]. The term social justice is too nebulous and people ... it's also loaded historically, but I think any teacher can be an agent of change but you have to, if you really want to maximize, you want to leverage that into something powerful, you have to be like, " I am agent of change". You have to self-identify and then I think teachers are doing things that agents of change do all the time but to really empower them they have to say it out loud and mean it and know it and then you're like, you feel more powerful and then you exercise that power.

It's interesting. It feels a little weird [talking about myself like this] because sometimes you feel like you only tell the selected parts, like the parts that made me sound good. It's weird to, but maybe this is a girl thing too. We don't want to brag ourselves or, [we] want to take a back seat. Not lean in. But its' fun.

I've always been, as a social studies person, interested in the history of social justice and civil rights. That's always been my angle, very social re-constructivist teacher, in Moore, which surprisingly never got me in trouble. Like specific curricular things I felt like would get me in trouble so if I discussed like gays or lesbians in history-

When I first started teaching I remember being like worried about losing my job. I was like, "Will I get in trouble?" Then you realize I would have to burn this place down to get fired.

Because [it was my hometown] I knew exactly, I think, in some cases how far I could push it and how to frame it in a way that wasn't going to push people's buttons but still get my message across...If we were doing Oklahoma history and we were doing the land run, it wasn't like totally dissing on the land run but we have to expand the narrative so that we can hear all the perspectives of the land run which for some people is genocide. I was teacher of the year for the district so I had a lot of capital I could invest and rely on. My mom had worked in the district so everyone knew us. I think that gave me

a lot of carte blanche to push people's buttons or do what I wanted, but I also have always been that way. Kind of my attitude has always been built that way.

Yeah. Just more like I'd rather ask forgiveness than permission. I'm going to do things first and then if it works, great. If it doesn't- if I have to apologize later, I will. I just didn't ever really about getting in trouble at work because I knew I was a good teacher and I knew my students liked my classes and my parents liked my classes because my students would talk to them about my classes.

Peony's narrative demonstrates that she is a member of the community in which she teaches. This insider status allows Peony to push the limits of what she can get away with while trying to expand the narrative in her class. Ultimately, her view of empowerment to make change involves claiming the title agent of change. Another component to her claim is that she can resist any negative consequences for these actions as long as she can prove that she was one of the best and most well-liked teachers in her school.

In this chapter, I presented my four participant's narratives in gently constructed way that allows their voice and thoughts to be center stage of this research. The stories generally began with a catalyst for their actions and choices followed by their conflict with power structures, mainly conservative ideology, and their own reflection and identification of their actions. Narratives while compressed largely display the voice, situation and thinking that most resembles our interaction. I felt it was important to keep these long stretches of narratives intact instead of using them for the more pointed purpose of promoting my research objectives. Using chunks of narrative aided in solving lingering questions over whether this work would be selecting phrasing for my benefit or of use to help others understand the lives of women educators.

In the following chapter, I take the five rhetorical turns and analyze themes within the framework of poststructural feminism and, ultimately, relate this analysis to contemporary scholarship on teacher activism. I reexamine the nature of conservativism and explore its role in these narratives as a discourse shaping educators in Oklahoma. Through this foundation, I make visible the

participants' contradictory notions of self as an educator of change. Additionally, I explore the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in evolving power matrices in the participants' personal and professional lives.

CHAPTER V

RED DIRT RESISTANCE: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION OF RICH NARRATIVES

This project began by seeking narratives from women educators in Oklahoma who act as agents of change in their schools and communities. In the effort to expose the sometimes hidden acts of educators acting at the intersection of politics, education, personal ethics and autonomy, this work examines narratives of women educators to explore the meaning of their work in a conservative environment. This work investigated how several women educators in urban areas navigate and resist conservative political ideology that discursively constructs norms of behavior for the purpose of promoting political and social interests. It was essential for me to choose women educators from a political context with which I was familiar and also where I worked with students, especially in grades K-12.

Being from Oklahoma and struggling with my own notions of what it means to be an elementary teacher in search of progressive educational practices, I built this project as a way to reflect on the notions of teacher activism that have been glorified in film and literature in faraway places (mostly the east and west coasts of America), where the professional and political context seemed to vary significantly from my own experience. What does it mean to be a women educator activist in a deeply "red" "flyover" state? My own reflections as an urban teacher, in combination with the narratives in this research, culminated in the inevitable conclusion that we

must retheorize what it means to be a teacher activist if we are to understand these experiences that occur outside of the typical context of change. Scholarship has largely positioned the "educator activist" as a distinct discourse that promotes narrow definition of educator activism and reproduces an educator stereotype as an ideal. This label and subsequent stereotype limit the embodiment and manifestations of educators acting for change in their communities. This is ultimately counter-productive in the education of new teachers and the development of current teachers. Examples of educator activists can be seen in multiple forms through the works of Picower (2012a, 2012b), Ayers (2016), and movies such as *Freedom Writers.* Often, and educator activist leads change, not just through curriculum, but in by engaging in protests, becoming politically active, joining teacher activist or social justice education groups, and attempting to makes change outside of the classroom. I don't mean to say that developing these actions as an educator are not useful or necessary, quite the contrary. Instead, I hope to add to the conversation of educator activism by expanding a potentially limiting concept. As an alternative, I am attempting to unpack the experiences of those who might be ignored when the complexity of educators acting as agents of change in multiple contexts is not considered.

The discourse surrounding our current conception of what it means to be a teacher engaged in social advocacy and change needs to be examined through an expanded framework that considers the subversive work done with students in the educational spaces. The participants of this study were sensitive to perceptions of their actions, prompting all of them to shy away from terminology like "activist" in favor of versions of the notion of facilitator and agents of change. This furthered my desire to examine their experiences and expand the current conceptions of educators of change.

As Patton (2002) explains it, I sought to make the hidden obvious by exploring specific urban women educators' narratives that began to pull at the borders of what activism means and what actions are required to justify the social justice label. The deep and labored self-reflection of the women in this project wrestled with the same conflicts of meaning and action. Almost

heartbreaking to witness at times, these women examined their motives to create change for their students which put them at odds with any number of power discourses they experienced as women and educators. Ultimately, I began to see a universal theme throughout the participants' stories of how conservativism, and the values therein, impacts their professional actions and alters the way they reference or name the work that they do.

When analyzed for layers of self-identification and fluidity of subjectivity, the narratives reveal messy contradictions of self, pain, fellowship, isolation, relationality, and the undeniable role of race and racism in the participants' lives. Race and racism's impact on the narratives was inextricable from the actions of the participants and the way they saw themselves. The analysis presented here is an attempt to build an understanding of these educators' actions, thoughts, and experiences. Their self-defined attempts at change allows us to question when and how, as educators, we challenge the educational system and our students. Their words allow us to disengage the notion of social justice educator from unblemished success and educator clichés.

This chapter synthesizes the analysis of the four narratives using a framework of poststructuralism and ultimately connects those findings back to the larger community of scholarship with implications for future research. In this chapter, I present my analysis as four overarching themes: conservativism, self-definition, activism and audit culture, and issues of race, power and the woman teacher as "other". In the first theme, I will define conservativism and explore the actions and reflections of the participants within this political environment. Within this conservative context, I will explore the participants' acts of self-silencing and navigating of authoritative boundaries while also questioning notions of tribal sovereignty and unity.

With this conservative frame firmly established, I will examine participants' expansive and contradictory notions of self-definition in relation to their actions as agents of change. I explore how participants reject and question labels related to teacher activism and utilize an intersectional approach to identification. Following this is an analysis of activism and audit

culture that pervades the participants' narratives and further frames the discourses shaping those narratives. Finally, I will explore discourses of power within the narratives that identify the intersectional role of race, class, and gender as an active agent in participants' actions as agents of change. At the conclusion of this analysis, I examine the implications of this research and suggest strategies for future research.

Defining Oklahoma conservative spaces as an agent of change

Conservativism—herein defined earlier in this work, that is, a resistance to change of the hegemonic practices and dominant paradigms of the state—is status quo for the social order in Oklahoma. Consistently labeled a "red state" for its political support of the Republican Party and passage of laws supporting conservative ideology, Oklahoma Conservativism enforces long standing practices that promote Christian values pertaining to marriage and abortion, opposition to equal rights for the LGBTQ community, and racial segregation and inequality through education reform laws. This ideology is sometimes hidden under the rhetoric demanding local control, free market capitalism and an enduring belief of meritocracy and exceptionalism (Mason, 2015; 2009). Conservativism wraps itself in fabricated morality that rationalizes the growing divide in access to educational resources as a choice. I contend that at the heart of modern conservative ideology, and to some degree progressive ideology, is an evolving version of colonialism. Conservatives, battling the forces of secular humanism, are called to defend the prominence and power of white Protestant culture by controlling curriculum, school reform, and access to financial resources (Mason, 2009).

Additionally, conservativism draws from notions of individual responsibility combined with limited roles and interventions by the federal government (Howard, 2014). Fiercely independent and propelled by the pioneer/settler discourse from westward expansion, Oklahomans use their political ideology as symbolic representative of their familial and local pride. As Carol Mason (2015) noted, conservativism in Oklahoma has made the state a springboard and a safe haven for extreme liberal and conservative activists on a variety of issues.

Mason's (2015) work examining unqueering efforts in Oklahoma by Sally Kern and Anita Bryant outlines how culturally conservative ideology shapes generations of citizens by positioning progressive calls for social change as anti-Christian and therefore un-Oklahoman. Similarly, the participants in this study were required to navigate these entrenched belief systems in order to fulfill their own idea of creating change in their educational communities. The narratives illustrate not only various viewpoints on conservativism, but also how it impacts them professionally and personally. It is interesting that despite the fact each had been raised in Oklahoma, they hold themselves separate from, but nevertheless affected by, conservative ideology. In fact, throughout the narratives, they indicate being constantly aware of its presence.

As I probed the narratives of my participants for the impact of conservativism, themes emerged from the narratives that spoke to the complex relationship of participants to the spaces they occupy. The overriding theme when examining conservative elements of the narratives is power based in social and political forces to align and promote ideology or reinforce behavior. Foucault (1977) referred to the power garnered and enacted as "…meticulous control over operations of the body" which are the mode of operation for schools, hospitals, and military training facilities (p. 137). In a larger way, he is implicating the form and function of modern society as the result of knowledgeable and deliberate action to duplicate discipline and power within social systems to society at large. Participants experience themes within this power matrix, known as conservativism, as a self-silencing (Violet), roles and punishment of authority (Peony and Jasmine), and a challenge to sovereignty and unity (Tulip). The power-based themes are overlapping with other themes related to self-definition and the role of race and they circulate in surprising ways. For simplicity, I am presenting the themes within the narratives by participants in order to retain the nuance of the narratives. Foregrounding the narratives in this section retains the personal and complicated messiness of the narratives that ultimately reveal that several of the participants wrestled conservative discourses and their own latent conservative leanings of which I perceived in them.

Violet: Self-Silencing

Self-silencing was a consistent marker for Violet in this theme of conservativism—a desire of the participant to remain quiet because outspokenness was disinvited. This participant's moment of self-silencing was in reaction to conservative boundaries placed upon her, as shown in the following section.

Violet's narrative is related to the theme of self-silencing by her own admission of hiding her opinions from parents and students, her fear of being seen as a political agent, and her pointed attack of teachers who vocalize their own activist or social justice leanings. Violet didn't feel comfortable speaking about politics with me at a local coffee shop that her students and their families might frequent. When I would point out her reluctance, she replied that she did have trouble saying she was a democrat out loud. She stated, "It is so weird. I don't know why. I guess, I guess, I am just so used to not, you know? It is hard to say out loud. In Oklahoma, it is". Despite her timidity, Violet's political beliefs were much more complicated than they first appeared. During our formal interviews, Violet was emotional in her reflection, but extremely cautious. She acted as though there could be reprisals for what she was telling me. However, in between our meetings, through email, she would send me news articles about activism and education-related segregation maps. A central focus for her was her fear of being accused of indoctrination. She also explained in detail the backlash from an article by Breitbart news focusing on a fellow teacher in her new suburban school.

She explained that this fellow teacher, who wanted to focus on race and privilege, made a statement about personally believing in inherent racism in white people. The story made national headlines which pointedly accused the teacher of indoctrination and claimed the harm and offense taken by white students. This story was a tool for Violet. She poked fun at the overzealous nature of her colleague while using his story as a warning. He had overstepped a boundary that she was trying to negotiate within the education system. Violet constantly policed her own behavior through comparisons. She spoke of a self-proclaimed "social justice" teacher in Oklahoma City

who was getting punched on a yearly basis by the students he was trying to help. She used their stories as a self-imposed boundary of acceptable behavior. She may have agreed with her counterparts on some level, but the consequences of their actions was a driving force in modifying her own. It is possible that to an outsider taking Violet's hesitation and fears out of context might leave her susceptible to critique. However, Oklahoma, formed by independent and federal colonization practices, is rich with stories of anti-communist sentiments, punitive actions against Native Americans seeking sovereignty, and LGBTQ individuals (Mason, 2015). This is not a distant past, but a current discourse that dominates media and shapes Oklahoma's political campaigns. As a public school teacher, Violet's hesitation and fear are not unfounded. Walking the line of activism, especially for an educator who has endured the demeaning conditions of an at risk school, is not straightforward. Violet's responses and views of her own actions demonstrate a complex system of ideological constraints and punishments. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine separating Violet's sense of agency from her self-imposed restrictions based on conservative norms and a desire, as she says, to keep her job.

Viewed another way, Violet is also enacting and embodying conservative ideology by disciplining her fellow teachers who move outside of the normed expectations. Her criticism acts as a disciplining mechanism of the panopticon, which Foucault describes "its aim is to strengthen the social forces-to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality, to increase and multiply" (p.208). Violet, in her own struggle with the powerful forces of conservative ideology has inadvertently aided in its replication. At the same time, one might ask how Violet could be an agent of change on her own terms and in alternative spaces as an educator.

For Violet, class plays a role in her perception of risk in becoming an agent of change. Violet came from a family with little money and little prospects for advancement. Her one advantage was being raised in a district with one of the best reputations in the state. This background impacts her views of risking her livelihood to resist authority. Over and over, in our

conversations she worried about the chance of losing her position or losing status in her position based on someone finding out her political or educational beliefs. In one of our interviews, Violet informed me that some teachers in the district were circulating an idea to have every teacher in the district to fail to inform the district (by way of an end of the year form) that they were returning to teach the following year. By not checking a box that there were coming back, the teachers hoped to evoke a fear of potential teacher shortage. These teachers hoped it would be a bargaining tool to gain more autonomy and control within the district. Violet never considered going along with their plan, too worried that she would be without a job.

Jasmine and Peony: Authoritative Boundaries

Jasmine's narrative relates to the theme of conservativism as expressed from through her recognition of authoritative boundaries set by conservative ideology. Jasmine associates conservativism in Oklahoma with an embodiment of authority that is in opposition to her own identity. Interestingly, Jasmine's views place conservativism in a binary with herself at one end as a progressive woman of color. She reflects "I think of male even though I'm sure there are women who also are conservative. I oftentimes think of white men when I think of conservatism. Whether that's in Oklahoma or anywhere, I think of that, white, straight, male". Jasmine's statement indicates that there are forces at odds with her beliefs. She views the dominant conservative discourse as an authority embodied by the white straight men. Her simple and short response to my question about how she navigates conservativism is representative of her struggle with the authoritarian conservative forces. She concludes that the expression of conservative views must come from a place of ignorance as a way to justify their existence. Again, for her, there is a binary where progressive stances on gender, race, and sexuality are correlated with education, while opposition to these stances is due to misinformation, or a lack of exposure, or some other pervasive ignorance. Using Mason's (2015) theory that Oklahoma politics and cultural climate stems from a forced homogeneity that has been cultivated to ensure that white,

non-queer Christians are saved, Jasmine's very being complicates that message and resists the colonial narrative.

Conversely, Peony's narrative is explicitly tied to power and authority of conservative ideology due to an attempt by her administration to punish her for her actions as a teacher and her intentional rejection of those attempts. Specifically, Peony experienced a strong push back from her administration when her actions and activities that ran contrary to conservative ideology. While she didn't start the Gay-Straight Alliance, she agreed to sponsor the highly motivated students who pushed for its formation. Her principal, who threatened her reputation in the school and local community, tried to force her to stop her work on the GSA. She remarked her principal was demonstratively religious and likely probably crossed the line promoting faith in schools. Ultimately, according to Peony, he told her "I'll be damned if I'm the administrator who lets this club happen on my watch". While Peony didn't feel intimidated by the principal's threats to her job and reputation, she stated "I was born nearby and lived here my whole life and graduated from school here and teach here and I don't care. I'm doing what I think and know is right for these students and what the law says that this district has to do."

Peony's narratives emphasizes the religious conservative beliefs permeating the educational environment. Peony's actions threatened her job and her professional relationships. The degree to which she resisted the personal application of those threats distinguish her from Jasmine and Violet. She doesn't view conservativism as punitive or menacing or an insurmountable obstacle to her desires. Nor does she indicate that opposition to her work from conservative teachers or administrators is a sign of ignorance. Instead, she negotiated conservativism in two ways, knowing the law and using her privilege as an insider member of her community and status as a white woman. She continually referenced knowing the law behind the challenges she received. She told her principal that the courts had already ruled about issues like having a GSA club and that the kids "have the internet". She took in stride the opposition that was directly addressed by court rulings. However, on issues of curriculum as she acknowledges

working subversively and “flying under the radar”. She readily accepted that a black woman educator would have been "playing the 'black card'". She agrees that "...there's no way a black teacher could've got[ten] away with half of what I got away with”. Peony acknowledges that race mattered in what she felt like she could do. It appears that successful negotiation of conservativism in education is tied to the insider status an educator has within the community.

Peony never expressed any anxiety over the disagreements she had with her school colleagues or administrators. She was confident throughout her narrative in herself and her actions. She acknowledged her negotiation of opposition to her social change efforts, but only peripherally. The only time she appeared unable to navigate this tension was when she recounted her experience with the recent 2016 presidential election. As an educator she is a force to be reckoned with, but personally she struggled to cope with the electoral loss of Hillary Clinton. She felt compelled to cancel a class and struggled to deal with her fears despite having lived her entire life in Oklahoma’s conservative climate. The notion that she was operating as an agent of change came naturally as she applied legal rulings and scholarship written by progressives who didn't feel compelled by the dominant ideology. However, strong nationalistic and anti-intellectual rhetoric presented on a national level created disequilibrium in what was a previously known and manageable discourse.

The ethos surrounding her memories of the presidential election was the strongest of our time together. She was visibly disturbed while admitting that she was afraid that the forces electing Donald Trump would dismantle the pendulum that swings from conservative to liberal action on education, leaving her and others with an impossible position. In Peony’s narrative, the notion of conservativism as a balance or alternative viewpoint was upended by the election of Donald Trump. She didn’t immediately connect how this would impact her teaching of pre-service teachers who voted for Trump, but she believes her work to be at risk with the far Right rhetoric of education which includes disparaging issues of equity and promoting school choice.

Interestingly, Peony's narrative hints of her own embodiment of conservative ideology. The lack of tension in Peony's narrative, except for her reaction to the recent presidential election presents a type of accommodation and assimilation to her conservative environment. Her moves through the education system seem to be vastly different from Jasmine, who rejects academic discourses as othering and authoritative. Peony acknowledges that she manipulates the system from the inside, knowing how to "fly under the radar".

Also, within her story, her professional success and the limited impact of discipline by authority indicates that she operates separately from, but within the supports of the conservative system. She operates outside of the boundaries of conservativism enough to offer counter narratives, rather than promote or demand alternative ideology, but she is enough of an agent within this sphere to avoid total censure. She offers a progressive stance for her students that is based and propped up by the conservative discourse so that her students can take or leave her educational stance without much tension. In a way, her change agent stance is hindered in this environment because she must use the system to gain access to pre-service students, also indoctrinated by the system, in order to offer alternative narratives to those who want it. The tightrope-like balance required to offer alternative narratives in conservative spaces, like higher education, means a certain adaptation and adoption of the system itself.

Peony's narrative defied my expectations and showed how, at times, teachers who try to teach from a social justice standpoint end up perpetuating the system they are resisting. In this example, Peony is promoting social change while inadvertently experiencing the advantages of that system. Peony exhibits privilege in being able to maneuver in a restrictive environment without much difficulty. It appears that she encounters little trouble when teaching about race and history or employing readings by Lisa Delpit with her urban education students. The lack of tension in her experience led me back to her examples again and again to try to make sense of her experience. Based on our conversations, I began to question how she employs these ideals of social change while avoiding any tension in teaching students from conservative spaces about

race. It is possible that our time together was insufficient to talk about this issue. In either case, I began to wonder about Peony's actions as a result of her professional and social context. Picower (2012a) specifically talks about creating activist teachers through the employment of tension in her teacher education classrooms. As a way to explore her experience, I contrasted it with how Lensmire, McManimon, Tierney, Lee-Nichols, Casey, Lensmire, and Davis (2013) connect a similar experience to the overuse of McIntosh's *White Privilege*: *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* in education classrooms. The authors claim that the work acts as type of synecdoche and a less effective substitute for deeper antiracist education that pushes white consciousness beyond superficial acknowledgment of privilege. I do not wish to judge the impact of Peony's pedagogical approach to social justice issues, but I believe it is important to highlight the lack of tension throughout her narratives.

Tulip: Sovereignty and Unity

Tulip's narrative is explicitly tied to conservativism through her expressions of sovereignty and unity. Tulip's professional experience led her to view conservativism as detrimental to the sovereignty and well-being of tribes due to its promotion of individualism and isolationism. The tribes, if united, would be a powerful force for change. Her views on conservativism reveal a process of cultural negotiation of political ideology. She explains how she must reframe political issues to her family and the community through the use of analogies. While her personal life is largely insulated from political tension, her professional life is still largely based on mediated relationships with non-native groups. She positions herself as a mediator between a conservative leaning education system and Indian Education. Part of her daily navigation requires her to quell teachers and administrators who are opposed to the "special treatment" of Native students who ask to wear eagle feathers at graduation. While Tulip does not directly attach this attitude to a political ideology, she, like Jasmine, attributes the resistance to her students as due to a lack of education. She uses the term "re-education" to describe her

professional mode. Indeed, when she is engaged to be the voice and the mediator for Native students she must explain Native culture to outside members of the school community.

Additionally, she framed her role in the mascot change as that of an educator. While she doesn't agree with the goals of conservative ideology as it impacts Native people or education, she sees her negotiation with those forces as that of daily necessity for an educator. She reasoned that a majority of the teachers she deals with are uninformed about Native students' cultural needs and norms and the public is largely uneducated about the meaning of derogatory names like, redskins. Conservativism is a facet of the larger sovereignty issue that all Native students face: the right to exist. She appears to personally associate conservative ideology with othering, as Jasmine does, but in a less personal way. Likely, because sovereignty is hard fought whether the pervasive ideology is touted as progressive or conservative.

Tulip identified a sense of insulation from the far reaching social implications of conservative ideology. As the director of Indian Education for the district, her main focus on politics relates to the disbursement of money through the Indian education programs. She states "*My political views, I guess, are really directed towards how the administration, the Trump administration, and Congress, how they push money and how they push the education part of that budget, I guess."*

With elders, like her Cherokee speaking grandmother, Tulip learned that political engagement had to be reframed culturally. She noticed that tribes focused largely on their own needs and functions within their tribal boundaries. Tribes largely remained isolated from each other regardless of geographic location. She attributed this disconnectedness among Native Americans in Oklahoma as a product of conservative influences. Self-interest and fighting to claim resources doesn't necessarily put tribes in competition for each other, but while struggling for a seat at the table and access to limited resources, she suggests that tribes overlook the power they could amass if they worked together. Conservativism, in this way, keeps marginalized

groups from obtaining meaningful power and voice by encouraging American nationalism and individualism, which is inherently at odds with efforts to solidify tribal sovereignty.

Understanding conservatism through multiple lenses

Carol Mason (2015) defines the new Right as synonymous with cultural conservativism. The main difference in the newly branded form of conservativism post-1964 is the sense of immediacy to remedy the faults of secular humanism and ties social issues such as gender, sexuality and reproduction as "…essential to American life and national survival" (Mason, 2015, p. 190). This is evidenced by Peony's confrontations with her principal. In Tulip's narrative, the defense of cultural norms is evident in claims Native Americans can be objectified and dehumanized through their portrayal as mascots also portrayed a position of cultural conservativism. For Tulip, the battle over renaming a local school mascot uncovered latent racism from community members, which became emotionally difficult for her young staff to handle. Tulip reacted to her staff's hurt and fear by assuming a defensive, mothering stance, speaking as though journalists would have to go through her rather than her younger subordinates as a means to protect them. Even though considerable time had passed, Tulip seem ready to engage aggressively in defense of her staff and protect them from racist community members. Interestingly, any opposition to what the Right perceives as American or Christian values, according to Mason (2009), is an attack on whiteness. It goes without saying that any attempt by Native American tribes in Oklahoma to gain political power will likely be examined from that perspective.

Each participant found different ways of working with and resisting conservative influences. However, all of their narratives indicate conservativism directly impacts their actions and that resistance to conservativism is complicated and evolving. Their narratives sometimes exposed their own conservative leanings. While Tulip and Peony associate cultural conservative ideology with a lack of historic knowledge, it is vitally important to dig deeper into the context of deeply red states like Oklahoma.

For example, Carol Mason (2015) warns against equating conservative movements and activists as examples of ignorance or backwardness. According to her complex research into conservative movements, she explains that to underestimate the complex adoption and adherence to conservative values, is to become trapped in a cycle of perpetuating them. There is a danger in claiming all conservatives as ignorant, as several of the participants did, because in doing so we fail to see past a duality of right and wrong. The consequences of this duality forces people into a state of defensiveness that claim progressive views are elitist, unrealistic, and out of touch with community values.

Self-Definition: Confounding notions and expectations of Woman Educator

Moving past conservatism, the next theme that presented itself is how my participants confounded expectations of "woman educator" as they worked to define themselves. Narrative analysis does not promote generalities, but seeks stories to "offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 116). While similarities exist and themes occur within those stories, it is important to note that the unique narratives in this research do not speak for the work of educators in all politically conservative environments or even all women educators in Oklahoma. I was limited in finding potential participants who would even communicate with me on this topic. At one point, I reached out to a woman I worked with many years ago. A retired teacher in her seventies, she at first replied eagerly to my initial email, but when I told her I wanted to interview her as an agent of change, she never replied to my subsequent attempts to connect with her. It seems that my request has at least temporarily altered our relationship. It became evident how powerful and politically laden this topic would be for potential participants. Ultimately, it proved difficult to find participants willing to explore their stories on such a sensitive theme. While participant selection was purposeful and based on expert referral, every participant in this research either knew me or knew someone who could vouch for me and my motives, which proved vital in their willingness to participate.

Several markers of this theme emerged that strengthen connections between the women educators' experiences. Themes discussed in this section will include the questioning and rejection of any labels, including the term agent of change. This theme included the participants' general avoidance of language that positions a person as an independent agent. Another theme was expressed solely by Peony, and that was that claiming agent of change as an identity was an act of empowerment. A final connected theme emerging from narratives is participants' understanding of situational context to determine their actions and self-identification.

Ultimately, language and subject positioning are extremely important to these narratives. For example, for Violet and Jasmine it was easier to answer an interview question about obstacles to trying to enact social change. For different reasons, however, they struggled to answer whether they did or didn't identify as an agent of change within the educational environment. Interestingly, none of the women felt comfortable with the term activist being applied to them in their current work and all expressed that the requirements to be an activist far exceeded their actions and their level of engagement in their personal and professional lives. Jasmine and Tulip, while referred to as an activist by other people for some of their actions, still questioned whether the label of activist held a meaning that didn't apply to them at the time of our conversations. The complication of self-identification, especially with politically laden labels, again encourage my questioning of whether the term activist was helpful, even a position to pivot from, in this research. I had largely determined from my previous research experiences that the term activist was negative in Oklahoma. However, I failed to see that in an attempt to identify their actions within an alternative category like "agent of change" most participants would judge their own actions with severe criticism. They, on different levels, just didn't feel like they had accomplished enough. This leaves unresolved questions about whether being an "agent of change" is based on intent, pedagogical orientation, or a list of successful actions

Questioning and Rejecting Labels

By and large, these women educators were uncomfortable with labels of any kind and Violet was no exception. Violet never stopped wrestling with whether she had the right to be interviewed and throughout the research process she asked me to validate her participation each and every time we spoke. Violet relates to the theme of rejecting and questioning labels by never resolving the debate of whether her actions would qualify her as an agent of change which led her to steer most of our conversations back to her wishes and intentions for her students rather than her actions. Violet dismissed the actions of her entire career as failing to meet the standards of success set by educational fantasy films like *Freedom Writers*. Violet avoided each opportunity to label or identify herself, instead focusing on fervent hope to meet students' needs in a defunct system.

She stated, "I've felt loads of responsibility and I have also felt like, because I haven't fixed these kids or I haven't had, you know, the kind of success that I want to have where all these people want us to have, you know, maybe I'm not good enough." For Violet, any self-identification or classification was halted by a need to evaluate her effectiveness. Any intention or subsequent action was meaningless in the face of perceived failure.

Interestingly, Violet's standards of achievement were set by media depictions, like the *Freedom Writers*, and reinforced by desperate administrators with similar unrealistic expectations. She states "...I get bogged down with this ideal that I have in my head that things are going to be perfect. And so, I get frustrated...I think, like, platitudes. I have these ideals in my head that I like beat myself against...". This self-doubt, spurred on by professional insecurity, acquired by working at a high pressure failing school, may have led her to her cynical view of self-proclaimed social justice teachers.

This is significant because her own self-doubt affects her perspective of the possibilities as an agent of change. She was especially impressed with the irony that one such teacher would frequently get punched every year even though he claimed to be a social justice teacher. She

ultimately doubted his credibility stating “And I think that when I would hear, like, that one teacher Mr. C., um, talk about social justice, I’m like… bullshit. Because I felt like he was just saying something just to sound good”.

Faced with the perception of failure, disconnected from her students, and belittled by her administrators, Violet came to the conclusion that she wasn't sure she was an agent of change by action or success. However, she did agree that her intention is same as those who professed to be teacher activists or social justice teachers. Reasoning through her experience she also came to believe that students who did not have their basic needs met were unlikely to gain much from social justice teaching due to the pervasive mistrust of the teacher and the education system. At the same time, she does not indicate that she feels she had any real impact on the system. While she has tried to take action to change students’ lives she is uncertain about the effect of those actions.

Along these lines, Jasmine relates to the theme of rejecting and questioning labels by her narratives examining her *Making Herstory* experiences where she was around other activists and the problems created through nebulous terminology as expressed in her higher education program. Jasmine constantly identified herself, whether in a community or an education setting, as a facilitator rather than agent of change, activist, or advocate. She believes that by and large activism can't be self-identified. She states "I don’t know it feels like something that you shouldn’t proclaim, but it should just be known". In every role she has undertaken, she engaged youth with ideas that connected to their experience and resistance of power discourses. Jasmine felt, probably more acutely than any of the other participants, what it meant to be an activist based on years of participating in activist circles. What makes Jasmine's self-identification so intriguing is the way outside forces influence her self-categorization based on perceived membership requirements and professional environment. First, Jasmine limits the role of activists to someone who does activist work as their full time job. Jasmine notes the activist stereotype and grapples with the meaning of her own actions in a different space. Activists, she

notes, " [t]hey have to go to protests, they have to go to rallies. Versus, I'm in my community and I'm having conversations with young people. Can't that be considered activism too?"

Jasmine's growing silence began in graduate school where she felt silenced by professors and other students. This was a growing trend exacerbated by working at her alma mater. She knows that words and actions can be misconstrued and her basic distrust of people in power has increased her cautiousness. Her goal to help kids from her neighborhood has cost her her freedom to speak as openly as she did as a community member running *Making HerStory*. She remembers, "It is unfortunate because sometimes I really do question why I am so silent in certain spaces now. And I can't quite figure out why I am that way, I think I've naturally been that way since I was younger, but I think maybe also academia and my program had something to do with it because it was very white and the times that I did speak out, it didn't go well.

Jasmine notes how restrictive the activist discourse can be, especially in academic spaces like higher education. Her master's program was largely made up of white instructors and students and she reflects that, again, it that in high pressured environment, she felt compelled to be pull back from certain interactions. The need to be unfailingly accurate with terminology altered her view of higher education and other activist communities as safe spaces. She states, "I feel like if you don't have the right terminology people can turn off. Like, they don't want to listen to you or they will think you are not as reputable..."

Ultimately, Jasmine's assessment of herself as an agent of change comes from the tangible nature of her actions. A meaningful, tangible marker of activism, according to Jasmine, is measured by its memorability. At one point when referring to the work she did in the community she questions whether *Making HerStory* will be remembered. Even so, she acknowledges that her work on *Making HerStory* has a better chance of being remembered than her work as an educator at her alma mater. She laments, *"*...which is unfortunate, because in a lot of ways there are a lot of educators that are doing such phenomenal work that don't oftentimes get that praise or won't get that praise 50 years from now".

Jasmine doesn't agree with her own conclusion, but seems resigned to the implications of the anonymity of the everyday educator. Her resignation is based on fear of censure from authority whether it be the critiques from history, supervisors, or other activists. At one point she noted that "...people in power can do some pretty corrupt shit". Jasmine's narrative offers two critiques in our current conception of activism in education. First, Jasmine's narrative illustrates a requirement of lasting impact of individual action, not that of a movement or group of like-minded educators. Secondly, she deconstructs the academy as a safe space to cultivate minority women as agents of change.

Each participant felt varying amounts of comfort with the application of labels or categorization. Tulip's narrative relates to the theme of rejecting and questioning labels in her constant avoidance of labels or wording that singles out her actions and isolates her from a group. Tulip, interestingly, would avoid using wording that claimed personal agency for creating change and heavily relied on the words such as advocate or voice. Tulip saw her role as a conduit for Native people and did not identify herself as separate from the people she served. A nationally known anti-mascot activist labeled Tulip an activist, but still she declined the label. She declares herself an advocate for students, parents, and the Indian education program in her district and nationally for urban children. She states, "I don't have a problem with being the voice or being the person to say it. I'll ask that that hard question, I'll make it feel uncomfortable".

Tulip's narrative contains a lot of power and outright rejection of categorizations that label her anything other than a voice or an advocate. She declares her advocacy stems from the need "[t]o be the bitch for the Indian community to outsiders or to our administration, to other community members, to Oklahoma City, to whoever is going to challenge or wonder or question about our kids, our programs, our community, our Indian people, how we do things, why we do them...". However, inside her community she balances the notion of activism with cultural norms. There are consequences with being labeled an activist inside Indian Country and she was sensitive to the differences in how she appears to outsiders and to her own community.

Interestingly, to be the 'bitch' is a label she readily accepts. Being the 'bitch' is a position of power and connotes agency that she perhaps doesn't feel when she assumes other positions. Either way, being labeled an activist does not have the same amount of personal power as saying you are a protector of Indian Country regardless of the whims or feelings of others.

When Tulip is confronted by older Indian men she becomes angry for the criticism coming from her community. She walks a fine line within Indian Country and with outsiders, all of whom question her behavior. When she relates a story about being accused of being an American Indian Movement (AIM) activist by friends of the family, she reflects on her own navigation of the activist discourse. When elder women joke with her about her notoriety in the community, she questions what her own actions mean in a continuum of tribal history. She backs away from being labeled, even in jest, by her extended family and friends as an activist. She told them "AIM would reject me. Because I'm not like hardcore activists... And then I said, "I'm not AIM you guys." And they were just laughing and I said, "I mean, who here is AIM?" and they all raised their hands". Suddenly, Tulip's denial was no longer based in fear of being afraid of looking like a radical. Now her denial of being an AIM member came from the awe of hearing the stories of these elderly women who fought for Native Rights during the Civil Rights era. She told them that she still couldn't qualify as AIM based on these new revelations and new stories of resistance. Ultimately, she found an even deeper sense of community with these women because of her efforts as an advocate.

For Tulip, the activist discourse is complicated by the expectations of race and Native culture. For so long, especially in Oklahoma, being labeled a radical activist in the Native community was not a good thing. Tulip's navigation of professional expectations and her goals of equality are complicated by the strict discipline of cultural norms for Native women. Hearing other women elders talk about their more visible protest history introduced a notion of humility into Tulip's role as an advocate. Unlike the other participants, this gentle mentorship gained her entry into a community of women who supported her work.

Intersectional Identification as Empowerment

While the notions of identifying as activist were rejected by the participants, they delved into their particular socio-political identities with relish and found a sense of empowerment in them. Jasmine and Violet see their actions as dependent on the space they occupied and expressed internalized feelings of stress, fear, and guilt. Themes emerged that suggested that the two women of color, Jasmine and Tulip felt different roles, obligations, and freedom of expression in professional and personal spaces based on their race. Alternatively, racial identity, for Violet and Peony, the two middle class white educators, was less of an issue.

Peony relates to this marker in how she employs the term agent of change to describe herself and how she seeks to encourage other teachers to use it, as well. As an educator, Peony pushed at the boundaries of raising students' social consciousness. As a white woman educator with insider status in her community, Peony was able to tolerate resistance to her actions and claim a label that others are hesitant to claim. Above any other label, Peony identifies herself as a teacher. As a teacher, she finds it imperative to claim the label of agent of change. She explains, "I am an agent of change. You have to self-identify... but to really empower them they have to say it out loud and mean it and know it and then you're like, you feel more powerful and then you exercise that power".

Peony's claim to be an agent of change is a dramatic difference from the other participants. Peony approaches the term as a banner for other women educators to claim. She uses herself as the example, as if to say, if I can claim it and draw power from it, you can, too. She is less concerned about the outcomes of attempts to promote equality in education and she encourages educators to self-identify and avoid politically laborious terminology like "social justice". In Peony's narrative, she seems to be activating the term agent of change as a teaching tool. She uses the phrase when training pre-service teachers to work in urban areas for the urban training program she helps run.

Peony's narrative also disrupted the gendered discourse in education. She talked about Sheryl Sandberg's notion of "leaning in" and problems of taking on too much work without appropriate compensation as a feminine trait that needed to be remedied. In a small way, she notices this and admits that making such claims such as "agent of change" would be uncomfortable and unnatural for most women. She connected this to her difficulty in saying no in her career or asking for money for her labor without feeling guilty. She may have claimed the title "agent of change" as a way of expressing solidarity with other women educators while it may not be her natural inclination. Above everything else, Peony uses herself and her self-identification as a model and a sort of teaching tool to promote agency in her (mostly female) students.

Summary

The women educators who participated in this study had a variety of experiences while seeking equality for their students in education. Peony and Tulip identify a personal and professional continuity in their actions. These women are unassuming, humble, and focused. Their commitment to pursuing equality in educational communities has spanned many types of actions and has been sustained over the period of years. One of the most important features of the analysis of the four narratives is the never ending self-critique and expectation to improve.

I had asked the women if they would agree with the term 'agents of change'. All agreed that the wording is laborious, but they understood why I was trying out alternatives to 'activist'. They all believed social justice-type terms, in general, are nebulous and lack consensus when applied to personal actions. At other times they viewed any and all attempts to categorize their actions as women educators as "loaded" with implications. Tulip and Jasmine have amazing stories of creating change in their communities, had been labeled as "activists" by others, but denied the term activist's overall application to their day to day lives. Listening to these women, watching their eyes fill with tears as they explained their struggle to create change and the frustrations therein, I saw how easily readers could judge and dismiss their stories of action.

The word activist assumes that a person has made a change in some aspect of society that perpetuates inequity. These women living their daily lives cannot measure the outcomes of all their efforts. They are doing the work. Period. In a kind of paradox, according to most of the women participants, one can't claim the title because you are experiencing the work of change as the agent. They are occupying difficult spaces that have no clear delineation of victory or success, especially when working within the schools is so overwhelming.

What these narratives have taught me is that with all of these women attempting change is done with humility. No one claims outcomes; all question them. No one claims anything but effort, work, passion, and determination. They are facilitators, advocates, educators, but they aren't activists. I felt, in my more frustrated moments, that women educators, like these women, were limited by operating under constricted boundaries of behavior that is promoted in conservative spaces. The stakes for monitoring their behavior were high and they were very conscious of their actions at all times. Most of the women were very worried about their personal anonymity in this research and at some point talked about the negative consequences that would be associated with their colleagues. This severe delineation of their identity categories and rejection of other categories seemed specifically gendered. In Munro's (1998) research on the life histories of women educator activists, she too initially puzzled at her participant's resistance to "name" themselves as resistors (p.110). She theorized that by not engaging in terminology that reinforced patriarchal order that relegated resistance as outside of authority norms the women were "contest[ing] the dominant masculine narrative" (p. 110). Interestingly, Munro questions whether her self-identification as an activist in fact reproduced existing power structures. I have struggled with this question as well. Ultimately, researchers need to broaden the narrative of teacher activism and contextualize actions of educators to address inherent difficulties for women educators who do not claim themselves as activists.

Activism and Audit Culture

Over the course of this research, I saw how detrimental an outcomes-based approach to social change can be. In the current audit culture of education, the pressure for immediate and visual results decreases the agency of those who are willing to pursue a long term approach to change for a more democratic society. We balk at high stakes teacher evaluations, but increase pressure on members within the social justice community. Whether real or imagined, the participant felt that pressure.

Literature on school reform and audit culture reminds us that while teachers should be regarded as public intellectuals, they are challenged by policies that add to the deskilling of the profession, as well as what Crocco and Costigan (2006) call "high stakes teaching". Educational environments discourage creative or critical thinking by restricting and mandating curriculum (Nunez, Michie, & Konkol, 2015; Taubman, 2009). Madeline Grumet (2010) through a psychoanalytical feminist lens, connects audit culture with the continued infantilization of the teaching profession. It is important to not just acknowledge the unfortunate realities in education today, but engage with these factors to a degree that we aren't unduly placing unobtainable expectations on teachers engaged in working in a system that devalues them and often coming from a "deficit model" teacher education program (Grumet, 2010). It is necessary to begin unpacking the modes of teacher discourses imposed upon preservice teachers to fully engage with stories of women educators acting as agents of change (see Britzman, 2003 for examples in teacher education).

With the knowledge of audit culture of education enacted in the conservative environment of Oklahoma, we can explore that all of the participants acknowledged the high bar required for activist status, yet none felt they could or should claim it outright. Only Peony was comfortable with the more accessible term of agent of change. Through Violet's conflicted dialogue, we find a self-critique that imposes tension on her every action. Jasmine, Peony, and Violet speak, indirectly if not directly, about their attempts to create social change as a work in isolation. Tulip's narrative is the exception. Her narrative is filled with descriptions about her

efforts in relation to parents, students, other Indian education members, elders, and members of national boards on Indian education. Regardless of the impact of others on their work, all the narratives, save Tulip's, warn of a perception of isolated efforts in a culture of self-doubt, critique, and tension. The amount of fortitude required to maintain any semblance of self-efficacy in the face of such obstacles is an achievement in and of itself. This research indicates that dismantling isolating elements of the teaching profession might go a long way towards impacting educators wishing to create social change.

Race, Power, and Women Educators as the "Other"

Race, gender, and power within the educational institution became repeated themes within the narratives after layers of analysis and sorting through member's meanings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Lutrell, 2000). I had expected a variety of discourses to enter the narratives, given the deep and repeating colonial history of Oklahoma. However, the discourses emerging from Tulip and Jasmine, the two participants of color, painted a clearer image of the normed requirements of women educators. Likewise, gender and race informed a different set of boundaries for the white participants, Peony and Violet. In the following section, I will explore the narratives of Jasmine and Tulip to expose a type of othering appropriated by educational and social discourses for the purpose of silencing women educators of color. Afterwards, I examine the role of race and class in Peony and Violet's narratives as agents of change in order to detail the white normalizing stereotypes that inform white educator's embodied practice. At the conclusion of this section, I will assess limitations and implications of this analysis as it informs a larger body of scholarship.

Racism and Agency: Jasmine and Tulip

I wrestled with Tulip and Jasmine's experiences, knowing that they are partial and incomplete (Britzman 2003), and I wondered if poststructural feminism was sufficient to explore their narratives. Poststructuralism acknowledges that the subject is precarious, changing and dependent on its locale (Weedon, 1997). However, the analysis of racism and agency in these

narratives is incomplete without acknowledging the intersectional nature of their construction. Crenshaw's (1991) foundational work in intersectionality moves past notions of essentialism to establish frameworks for viewing race and gender. Crenshaw (1991) reminds us that "[r]ecognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all" (p. 1299). While this analysis tries to avoid an essential view of race and gender, it remains mindful that it is not enough to promote multiple identities. This work attempts to use those intersections to explore the boundaries and dimensions in which the individual subjectivities are expressed (Crenshaw, 1991).

The narratives in this study were forged in the colonial atmosphere that created and still shapes Oklahoma. If the future, I hope to rework the analysis from a postcolonial perspective. I acknowledge that Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) work is useful in deconstructing the power and discipline to control Indigenous people who push the acceptable definitions of what it means to be Indigenous or a woman. I am particularly drawn to Anzaldua's (1999) metaphor of the borderlands. Anzaldua's borderlands and her poetic illustrations of how culture and tension shape the subject is a useful metaphor for understanding the movement of women of color from community spaces to educational spaces.

Regardless of approach, theory indicates that there is an irrevocable discursive power from educational institutions that alter the subjectivity of those who engage in its arenas (Thomas, 2011; Thorne, 1993). Carol Mason (2015), who works from a more grounded perspective of Oklahoma than the other feminist theorists incorporated in this work, points to conservativism modus operandi to censure anyone who appears to reject the embodiment of white, heterosexual Christianity. Unfortunately, some of Jasmine and Tulip's experiences are the direct result of being a minority woman in Oklahoma. According to Weedon (1997) the discursive field, as found in education, provides a series of structured modes of subjectivity that is offered to an individual.

Moving outside of those modes of being are susceptible to discipline if they stray outside of their intended boundaries (Foucault, 1979).

Throughout the interviews, Jasmine recounted institutional and blatant racism in her current profession as a counselor that made her question her own actions and agency. At one point she stated, "...even if I am a community member and someone who grew up in that community, I know I have to tread carefully... I rarely ever said anything because I know that people in power can do some pretty corrupt shit..." Jasmine's feels this paranoia may be abnormal, but she tries to explain why her behavior has changed so dramatically from her independent work as a community activist to her work as a high school counselor. She is unable to find satisfactory answers; instead, she positions herself as in a state of reflection, watching and acknowledging the newly imposed norms from her first year on the job. In one example, she talks about a coworker who is interested in starting a women or cultural studies club. This person is a white woman with longevity in the school and is likely to get her request. Jasmine realizes that she is not going to have the same opportunity noting, "She can say certain things like that and, for me, I have to be much more careful*".* The distinction between the opportunity afforded her versus her coworker seems to Jasmine to be based in race and possibly experience. Throughout her narrative she talks about treading carefully or acting with care due to feeling like the "other".

Jasmine is acknowledging a different set of standards for a white women counselor with considerable experience, to herself, a first year counselor woman of color. She articulates discomfort and frustration with the imposition of norms that are different for the two of them. Her colleague feels no sense of hesitation or barrier to suggesting a project that is similar to something that Jasmine did as a community member. However, Jasmine's discomfort is beyond mental tension, it actually restrains her to the point where her behavior is markedly different now before she worked there. All narratives, like this one, demonstrate the act of negotiation that comes from exploring one's actions and perceptions in differing spaces (Britzman, 2003; Jackson, 2001, Weedon 1997).

I think [my skincolor] definitely does make a difference…I mean, something I did tell my partner, I told him, I said, I feel like when I am work they view me as white. Like they don't even recognize that I am Arab and Asian... unfortunately, they don't really take into account who I am, but, and my different ethnicity, but then also maybe, I don't know, I'm mixed, so sometimes I say, "Do I look white?". I ask my partner that. He's like "no, you don't look white!"

Unfortunately, Jasmine's narrative grapples with the crippling effects of racism that stems from a lack of diversity in the field of education where the majority of teachers are white women and little work has been done to correct this trend (Galman, 2012, Ladson-Billings, 2011). Jasmine's embodiment of a progressive woman of color is unrecognizable within her office. Jasmine operates outside of the discursive boundaries that describe a woman educator as compliant, nurturing, susceptible to political power, and a tireless promoter of the status quo (Galman, 2012; Goldstein, 2014; Meiners, 2002). Those norms exist to produce subjects as recognizable making it difficult for others to recognize her (Butler, 2010). She is essentially invisible to the white women in the office precisely for being the antithesis of the norms they represent. Jasmine feels this leads to them saying racist things around her. She has concluded that while her coworkers genuinely care about the students there is a portion of false generosity mentioned by Paulo Freire. She reflects that "... *there is no depth to the woman wanting the cultural studies program. It is because it will be a pat on your back. There is no depth to the understanding what it means and the importance of it.* Jasmine connects her own invisibility to her coworkers' false generosity and their failure to understand Jasmine's potential contribution.

She largely mistrusts the motives behind the programming suggestions from her colleagues because they fail recognize her as she recognizes herself. Butler (2010) describes this as a frame placed upon the subject, much like how Jasmine appears to her colleagues. In a sense they simultaneously use the frame to convey the essence of Jasmine and contain it. This is how she is simultaneously enfolded into the white woman educator narrative, which leads her to

question her own identity. The irony of Jasmine utilizing Paulo Freire while I pursue a poststructural feminist interpretation of her narratives has not escaped me. Jasmine believes in the application of critical theory to her experience and there is good reason to utilize such an application. However, for the purposes of this project I am using the poststructural feminist approach to highlight areas and strategies for change (Weedon, 1997).

I find it interesting that Jasmine has constructed a binary in her narratives of her white women colleagues and herself. I agree with her application. Additionally, I believe that the dominant discourses that shape Jasmine's temporal narrative are motivated by political interest and power. The otherness and failed recognition she experiences aligns with Mason's (2015) view of conservativism. Jasmine's silence is very real, as is her sense that she is not safe to employ her skills and efforts for social change in her new school environment. For this work, it is not enough simply to highlight the injustice *of* or obstacles *for* women educators of color. It is essential to my use of poststructuralism to "raise critical concerns about what it is that structures meanings, practices, and bodies, about why certain practices become valorized or deemed as traditions while other practices are discounted…" (Britzman, 2003, p. 248). While seeking to understand the experiences of women educators acting as agents of change, I have discovered that there are a multitude of impediments to women of color acting as change agents in a white majority, highly feminized career (Drudy, 2008; Galman, 2012; Goldstein, 2014; Meiners, 2002).

Tulip's narrative, sadly, delineated the consistent colonial and racist beliefs that are a narrative undercurrent of life in Oklahoma. This undercurrent becomes more visible when the I am not Your Mascot or Black Lives Matter movements disrupts the normative discourse and awakens social consciousness that reveals our horrific racist past is still embodied in everyday actions. After the term 'redskins' was removed as a mascot of a local high school, the community reaction was hostile and volatile. She recounts, "But still, the day came when the alumni were furious, and were cussing people out and in people's faces, and probably the first time my staff has seen … I have a young staff, they saw overt racism". Tulip's narrative

expressed concern for her young staff's physical and emotional safety while explaining that to many of them, this was their first experience with "overt racism". She noted that this was a learning opportunity because this was the first time racism was rendered visible to her staff. The racism Tulip is referring to is always present, even if it is hidden from view, in a colonialistic society. Publically outlining the horrific history of the language employed to describe Native Americans as a team mascot, is significant to her efforts for local change. The community, Native students, Tulip, her staff, all are coupled to the conscious and unconscious discourses that construct whether they will be recognized or misrecognized (Britzman, 2003, p. 251). Tulip is situated and disciplined by the colonial discourses that shaped and confirmed that Native Americans can be subjugated to a caricature eliminating them as recognizably human.

Judith Butler (2010) reminds us that there is a small shift in situation and circumstance that changes the discourses that would redefine a terrorist into a freedom fighter. She points out that again and again from examples in U.S. history, our friends become villains and the sacred can turn profane. To maneuver from a virginal and amenable subjective space to a position of change maker means that the subjectivity embodied may either be viewed as that of a heroine or that of a traitor. This view hinges on the acceptance that the gendered nature of a subject is socially and culturally constructed (and contested) and the essentialized gender of the woman teacher is questioned. For Tulip, she embraced the role of mediator in her leadership position, but when becoming the impassioned voice for anti-racist practices in education, she was viewed from dramatically different perspectives.

Tulip explains that there is resistance and possibly envy from some of the older Native American males in the same professional circles. She feels some negative energy from them when she walks in the room. She states that "it really bothered me, that really for my own people to come up to me and say that [I shouldn't have fought to end the mascot]". Her actions to remove the mascot followed her to an annual Native American church gathering. While cooking with friends and family they teased her saying "Oh, there she is. There's that AIM fighter".

In *Frames of War*, Judith Butler states that a shift in a pervasive discourse can rename a subject, changing the meaning of the subject's actions and essentially rewrites how we recognize, interact, and assign agency to the subject. While her book focuses on the lack of recognition on Middle Eastern people as human, her arguments explain the shift in Tulip's perception of her own subjectivity. Butler explains that a terrorist can become a freedom fighter, or vice versa, but that we must "…consider more closely the conditions and terms under which such inversions of discourse take place…"(p. 159). Tulip's narrative indicates how this may be true on a smaller scale. If we examine the reaction to her experience in removing the school mascot we see two groups, a largely white community based in the school neighborhoods and the Native American community.

Within the Native American community, she pursues action while resisting the stereotypical educator discourse and cultural gendered perspectives as a Native women of power. The previous quote mentions how the elder males despise her and think that she acts as a know-it-all. Additionally, an elder woman also spoke badly about Tulip to one of the women who would later tease her about being an AIM fighter. With contradictory reactions to her work in both the white and Native community, it is understandable that Tulip becomes defensive when the Native women cooking with her called her an AIM fighter, the strongest version of a cultural activist for Native Americans, or at least the ones with the most notorious reputation. Hurt from previous encounters, Tulip initially resisted the "AIM fighter" label by women elders. What is revealed is that, like Butler (2010) indicates, Tulip's action broke free from a matrix of power that defined her actions as a woman educator and a Native woman. Tulip internalized the negativity associated with the Native American activist stereotype. It wasn't until the other women revealed their more dramatic involvement with AIM that Tulip began to question how she fits into the discursive narrative of a Native woman who work for equality.

In some ways, Tulip's experience can be related to the way the United States views Colin Kaepernick, either as a traitor or a hero. The discourses that prescribe a Native American

woman's behavior, one might argue, are even more dangerous to resist than those of a famous NFL athlete who kneels on the sidelines during the National Anthem. In any case, Tulip's actions show a difficult and tricky resistance to power that requires her to navigate a tight rope. The tension and conflicting ways of being are evident as she explains making a choice in whether her role is to be the "bitch" and the "mediator". These roles are contradictory, but ones she can employ at any time to meet the requirements of the space she occupies.

Tulip's and Jasmine's experiences highlight the challenges and personal tolls faced by women of color educators who seek change. Their narratives suggest that scholarship on teacher activism should focus on the role of race and power in the actions of educators seeking to be social change agents. Current scholarship, sometimes blind to importance of social (especially conservative) spaces, positions women of color as social activists. Jasmine and Tulip's narrative indicate that two distinctly different experiences, assimilation and resistance to racist discourses. Re-theorization of teacher activism means that we need to rethink how we teach young educators. Teacher training, in this retheorization, can aid young educators to contest educational spaces and strive for social change understanding the communities they work with as well as the additional risks for women of color. Any education training in how to support minority women educators would be a welcomed addition to higher education training. Tulip's claim of the "bitch" persona means that the majority of white women teachers and teacher educators have to acknowledge their own positioning in her defensive stance. Perhaps equity, in this case, means that we support our sisters, the women of color educators, by promoting unity regardless of the means used to create change.

Resisting Lady Bountiful: Peony and Violet

Initially, I contrasting themes from the narratives of Violet and Jasmine, who appeared to have little power in their professional life, with that of Tulip and Peony, who had positions of leadership and a certain amount of professional autonomy. While this point would be worthy of investigation, after a few attempts at writing through the layers of analysis, it became apparent

that the stories were more clear when race was written as the central feature of experience. Likewise, as I shifted through the data from differing thematic categories, I found that differences between Violet and Peony's narratives were harder and harder to reconcile as two white women educators around the same age. I spent months worrying through the narratives to find evidence of similarities of what were very different experiences as educator change agents.

What kept surfacing was that Peony and Violet had expressed the same level of intent to change the lives of their students. Their actions were guided by the same kind of passion and dedication. Yet, ultimately, Peony seemed to be largely successful in her attempts, while Violet felt like a failure and, ultimately, distant from her students. It is not sufficient to say that teachers can be ranked according to effectiveness in their approach to social justice in their teaching. That line of reasoning stems from the audit culture that has seeped into every corner of education and has no place in the examination of actions of educators who attempt social change. Violet and Peony's narratives are vastly different. Analyzing the narratives for perspectives of navigating discourses that contrive stereotypes for white women educators is one way to examine the difference and tensions in two narratives.

I would argue that the central discourse that shapes Violet's and Peony's careers as educators stem from the long existent trope of the Lady Bountiful, fully examined by Erica Meiners (2002). The white, feminized, Christian, and colonizing attributes of Lady Bountiful position the woman as a mother to the rough "native" student who needs to be educated in American values and community norms. Lady Bountiful operates under the notion of Manifest Destiny where students are shaped and assimilated into the dominant culture. That is not to say that white women are solely responsible for a public school system that focuses on Americanization and the creation of good (assimilated) citizens. However, white women educators have historically been a widely used colonizing tool in efforts to Americanize immigrants and minority youth (Goldstein, 2014, Hendry 2011). As the result, the woman educator is often both colonized as a discursive subject and colonizer (Hendry, 2011). It is

uncomfortable to think that Peony and Violet's subject positions (Hendry, 2011) in combination with their ideals of democratic education, are impacted by the Lady Bountiful trope. However, it is my position that their effectiveness, or at least, their view of their effectiveness, is completely contingent to how well they navigate this trope.

Peony talks about how she realizes her actions as a teacher in a suburban high school would have meant a women of color would be playing "the black card". Instead, as white woman, she portrays her success as the result of claiming her subjectivity as an emic member of her community, even though she admitted that some of her students thought she was playing the "woman card". Ultimately, she was able to use her knowledge of the school, the parents, and the town to push at the boundaries of social norms in the feminized field of education to bring about change benefiting Asian and students supporting the Gay Straight Alliance. Interestingly, Peony is the only participant who has no regrets, no signs of tension related to her activities, and no apparent questioning of her own actions, unlike Violet and Jasmine. It is possible she worked these out earlier in her career or at a different point in her life. Considering her social status and whiteness matched the community in which she taught, it appears that no negative consequences have impacted her career. According to her narratives, Peony has never had her actions challenged in the same way as Tulip. Peony's narrative stands apart from the other participants with respect to her status as a white woman educator operating under the veil of the privilege Lady Bountiful has bestowed upon her. Peony's mantra of "it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission" shows the privilege to push social boundaries within her community and school. Any disregard of potential consequences coming from authorities upset with her actions is the result of an expectation of being forgiven or knowledge that the consequences would not be too dire.

Violet matched the passion and intensity of Peony's desire to create a more equitable education system, but as a high school English teacher in a failing urban school. Violet faced problems beyond just meeting the needs of below level students and a demoralizing administration. Racial tension was featured strongly throughout her narrative. I assert that

Violet's negative experience as an agent of change was the result of a lack of solidarity with her black students by adhering to feminized colonial discourses that continue to produce whiteness and bound teacher behavior (Lensmire, 2017; Meiners, 2002). The byproduct of misunderstanding between the students and herself created tension and emotional crisis of unmet expectations.

Violet identifies two main areas that act as roadblocks to meeting her students' needs and connecting emotionally with her students. Violet interprets these missteps as students unable or unwilling to meet her halfway or giving up on her entirely by declaring that she is a racist. These areas represent differences of perception that put her at odds with her students despite having a desire to give them a chance to have a more challenging and stable educational experience than they had previously. One is that she can't give them what they want: easier work, continuation of readings that are relatable to their experience, personal bias on political issues. The other is that she can't reach them based on the issues of discipline. In her mind, efforts to discipline students lead to her being accused of racism. Ultimately, Violet's status as an outsider and her engagement with the trope of Lady Bountiful, which I liken to her reference of the woman educator stereotype in the movie Freedom Writers, prevents her from gaining solidarity that would have created a synergy between her and her students. This is evident when she reflects that she couldn't "*walk across that bridge"* and meet her students halfway.

Violet reflects on how demanding more from her students and disciplining them results in pain incurred by her students' mistrust of her motives. Violet views discipline as a tool to create a learning environment to give them an education to which they don't currently have access. Violet, while mentioning the deskilling demoralizing impact of her teaching evaluations, focuses on the inevitable sense of guilt that ultimately results from her internalization of the white savior teacher trope, also known as 'Lady Bountiful'. Her sense of guilt is overpowering to witness and seems to be personalized beyond the scope of her career.

Unfortunately, the discourses shaping the construction of the woman educator demand that she is a highly feminized savior/mother figure, virginal, and the embodiment of American values (Grumet, 1988; Meiners, 2002; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007). This discourse is the root of the tension in which Violet finds herself. Over and over she mentions how she becomes angry at the stereotype of an ideal teacher, while simultaneously trying to embody it. Again, her notion of the ideal teacher is one that presents complete neutrality and impartiality inside the classroom. She remembers after the 2012 election she "didn't want to tell them who I voted for because I had this ideal of what a teacher should be like my whole life". Violet positions herself as neutral in the classroom as a way to enact her vision of the perfect teacher aiding in individual student development. However, she admits, "they didn't know how to take me sometimes".

Ultimately, as Violet narrates, it is *she* who is unable to meet her students halfway. A false notion of neutrality, prevalent in discursive construction of woman educators, kept Violet from achieving solidarity with her students. Instead of meeting her goals for democratic education, she was caught in a cycle trying to meet the expectations of her district, while being told she was failing to embody the savior mentality or the fictionalized version of Hilary Swank in Freedom Writers. Ultimately, the discourse of neutrality and the ideal teacher made it difficult for Violet to fulfill her own expectations.

The narratives explore a complex intersectionality of gender, race, member status, and privilege. The lessons from the analysis of these narratives creates questions about the role of racialized stereotypes on women educators seeking to be agents of change in their communities. This research sought traditions in the work of women educators from the late nineteenth century to today as a foundation to further contextualize their experiences. In my view, the narratives of this research compels academia to continually question the impact of discourses on teacher identity construction as well as meet the challenge to find hidden discourses that also forcibly shape educator identity. Tamboukou (2000) indicates women teachers constantly struggle between dichotomous notions of the teaching identity. Women educators must balance the

expectations of a public and private to both perform and resist the implications of being a woman educator.

While the traditions of women educator change agents is paralleled in the narratives of this research, poststructural thought demands that the narratives be situated locally and subjected to repeated reinterpretation (Bushnell, 2003; Weedon, 1997). Weedon (1997), also reminds us that poststructural feminism is concerned with "understanding the position of women in society and the way in which they are governed by and resist specific forms of power" (p. 71). The women in this research had various ways of resisting the power matrices in their lives. I cautiously assert that Tulip and Peony were able to resist at a more significant level due to their perception of a secured or emic status in their personal and cultural communities. It appears that the isolation that can stem from being an instigator of social change is a crucial component in the agency expressed by the individual. Both Jasmine and Violet's narratives separate themselves from the co-workers with whom they work. While Peony never directly mentioned relying on the use of colleagues, her reflections contain peripheral comments about a "cohort" of likeminded social studies teachers and a continuous connection to higher education that promoted critical education approaches. However, one cannot escape the conclusion that a conservative educational environment requires some type of communal support to disrupt the boundaries of being a woman educator of change in Oklahoma.

Carol Mason's work in *Oklahomo* and *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right*: *Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy*, not only provides analyses of right leaning conservative movements, but describes a discursive movement meant to perpetuate or retain socio-cultural norms. The cultural conservative discourse prompted Okahoman Sally Kerns, a former politician, to claim that homosexuality is a greater threat to the United States than acts of terrorism from 9/11 (Mason, 2015) . The discourse of Oklahoman and American values that shapes public and political spaces in Oklahoma comes from reactionary opposition to perceived white oppression (Mason, 2015). This discourse shapes the public

embodiment of teachers who work in Oklahoma, whether they personally agree becomes secondary to an enforced silence and compliance to the goals of local political structures. Discourses, such as these "represent political interests and in consequence are consistently vying for status and power" (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). The woman educator is ultimately the embodiment of the state asserting power over its citizens. The women educators, a manufactured Lady Bountiful, must negotiate the powerful pre-scripted roles to engage in any level of social change, if they are willing or desire such a challenge.

Mason (2009) warns us not to be seduced into thinking that all culturally conservative movements are formed from ignorance based on a lack of education or exposure to diversity. This perception of ignorance, I believe, is what has partially prevented work such as this study from being done previously. It is important to consider how whiteness and discourses intersect in the perpetuation of the white cultural (conservative) identity. Lensmire (2017) suggests through his extensive autoethnographic and narrative research on white citizens of his hometown in Wisconsin, that whiteness is constructed through the identification of and "exotification" of blackness. Whiteness, in a sense, requires an antithetical black identity to construct views of purity and morality. Whiteness and the fight to retain social power are constructions in the women educator stereotypes. Lensmire's theories join other anti-racist scholars in and attempt to move beyond an examination of privilege of whiteness to exploring the more nuanced and recursive features of the white identity.

From this perspective, Violet and Peony's narratives continue to view students of color or gay students from a subjective difference, or, otherness. Their work is on behalf of students, not necessarily in conjunction with minority students. For instance, Peony tried to reason with her principal by stating that the students forming the Gay Straight Alliance already knew about their rights according the law stating, "they have the internet". What is notable is that Peony did not attempt to debate with her principal over equal access of school resources for student groups. She did not engage with her community in a moral debate over what is justice or equality. Instead, she

tried to build a logical argument for her principal about the groups' inevitable existence. This creates an interesting juxtaposition where she can retain her status as a respected educator and member of her community while assisting change in her school. Likewise, Violet's push to move students from *Blackboy* to the classic *Romeo and Juliet* did as much to reinforce the white centric positionality of the education system as it did to separate herself from her student's perspective. Violet wanted the students to engage with literature that acknowledges their experience, but she continually tempered and restricted her actions in order to maintain a status quo that would enable her to keep her job. While other instances of perpetuated white identity might be found in this work, there is an underlying importance of adding the works of Mason and Lensmire to research on the subjectivity of women educators. There is an undeniable intersectionality that pervades women educators acting as agents of change, more so in regions where cultural conservativism pervades social and professional norms.

It is unavoidable to consider the role of class in Violet and Peony's narratives as a part of that intersectionality. Violet and Peony both claim to be from a poor or working class backg/round. As teachers, they are part of an educational system that reproduces and distributes cultural capital as well as reinforcing the social structure (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Yet, despite being informed by working class values, both participants now live as white middle class women. The role of class in their own lives creates a tension in the role they play within the very education system that reproduces social structures. Both Violet and Peony must merge their personal experiences with their professional roles. For Violet, navigating the ideal of neutrality while dreading the consequences of that neutrality speaks to her desire to succeed in an occupation and pay her bills. Peony's leadership at her school likely stems from the ethical values attached to labor from her working class farming family.

Regardless of their background, both women were products of an education system that reproduces class structure. Working class values declare that socially and economically one can climb the "ladder" to success by following an education model of success. What has worked so

well in their own life has to be adopted, adapted, or rejected in their pedagogical practice. Social class, with all of its unique rules, trappings, and values becomes a condition of Violet and Peony's pedagogical choices. Whether Violet strives to teach *Romeo and Juliet* as part of a mandatory curriculum or focus on personally relevant curriculum, she also understands the traps that come from the cultural reproduction of poverty.

Like Violet, Peony's narrative indicates that she worried about losing her job until she became a veteran teacher in her district. However, as Peony gained social status in her community her actions as an educator began to directly address inequalities in her school. Ultimately, Peony sought to subvert the system of class reproduction in her school by using her role as an educator to create space for change. Personally, Peony's identification with her own family's history of being rural and poor in Oklahoma inspired her to name her son after Woody Guthrie. Peony's narrative reflects elements of both middle and working class life. As Valerie Walkerdine (1990) explains, the leaving of one class for another is not without loss, pain, and isolation. However, it is likely this overlapping of class structures that informed Peony's view of educator resistance. By escaping the bourgeois notions of individualism and "being somebody", Peony is able to navigate the discourses of public and higher education in order to promote change (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 47).

Conclusion

One answer to the call to create equitable and democratic education has been to promote social justice education at the undergraduate level. My literature review includes scholarship by Boggess (2010), Chubbuck & Zembylas (2008), Mirra & Morrell (2011) and Montaño, Lopez-Tórres, Delissovoy, Pacheco, & Stillman (2002) who, in their own ways, examine the role of teacher education in creating teachers as change agents. However, my analysis provides some clear warnings in eager constructions of "teacher activists". One of the biggest warnings against the perpetuation of the social justice teacher or teacher activist as a stereotype is mentioned by Violet. She makes fun of the man who wears the title because he is often ridiculed or acted

physically upon by the students he is serving. Violet also saw the irony in the male educator who tried to expose whiteness as having implicit racism and his efforts became fodder for Breitbart news. This image, in addition to media stereotypes of social justice teachers, created conflicting schemas for Violet. Violet continually cycled through multiple, albeit, conflicting discursive constructions of what it means to be a "teacher activist" or "social justice teacher". These conflicting discursive constructions shaped her attempts to create equitable and democratic education as an English teacher.

The danger of the activist label has been fleshed out by my participants in their avoidance and denial of the application of the term. The literature cited above indicates trends in teacher education of the construction of a new discourse that pre-service teachers must grapple with in addition to the expectations associated with graduating as a fully formed "teacher". Deborah Britzman's (2003) study of the identity construction of preservice teachers determined that teacher education shapes the students' identity rather than the student emerging through the teacher education process in an agential way. These educator specific discourses are created within teacher education and further promote acceptable versus unacceptable thoughts and behaviors that complicates the notion of the Lady Bountiful discourse already engaged in the halls of the university. The way that Britzman (2003) describes a novice student assuming the mantle of a "teacher" speaks to me of the same process to produce social justice educators, or at least as it is represented in scholarship.

I do not intend to say that social justice inspired pre-service education is not appropriate or useful to a field that is largely comprised of white females. Indeed, I feel quite the opposite. Unfortunately, it is also my assumption that requiring the white females to take on the mantle of social justice education without truly understanding the construction of their own identity or the historical or social aspects of minority status in conservative areas like Oklahoma will serve only to further alienate our students from their potential. In my time teaching undergraduate students, it occurs to me that until teacher education programs, like those in conservative areas, fully

concede the discourses they are supporting, Lady Bountiful of otherwise, we may find ourselves perpetuating the very discourses we are trying to teach students to resist.

Personally, as I look back through my narrative at the beginning of this document, its chords of irony pang my heart as I think of the frustration I felt as a silenced elementary teacher and my own part in the production of white identity with my undergraduate students. Lensmire et al (2013) warns that a superficial view of white privilege that does not consider class or geography actually may prevent students from truly interacting with antiracist information. Additionally, Lensmire et al (2013) see the usage of McIntosh's invisible knapsack as limiting and argues that it closes dialogue from white education students who have varied experiences with diverse culture and racism. Most important to this work is the need to constantly question the hidden or ignored discourses that are engaged to shape educators.

In addition to potential implications for teacher education, this work seeks to promote more research on the lived experiences of diverse women educators in varied geographic areas, conservative or otherwise. The gap in the research to date still centers on urban educators in large metropolitan areas where a diversity of thought and practice or support for social change is more readily available. Besides adding to the scope of information about what we know of women educators experiences, every piece that pursues the topic of women educators acting as change agents adds to the collective movement of women and disrupts the conceptions that limit women educators.

Madeleine Grumet's (2010) reminder about the complicity of higher education in the difficulties facing modern educators serves as a rebuke for anyone thinking that just engaging social justice pedagogy in their higher education classrooms is sufficient. My view is not to just walk the walk, as the saying goes, but to push deeper into the meaning of equity within every area of education, including teacher education. I hope to expose contradictions and deconstruct the discourses that we who teach education majors freely perpetuate. While Grumet is a humanist, I find her critiques of education invaluable. However, it is Judith Butler's (2015) words that have

the greatest implication for this work. She states "that no one transcends the matrix of relations that gives rise to the subject; no one acts without first being formed as one with the capacity to act" (p. 8). However, Butler does give us hope that there are ways to navigate and resist social forces and power matrices that have shaped us (Butler, 2015, 2010). The implication, here, is that the examination and promotion of women education change agents begins with the deconstruction of the discourses we employ or fail to resist in education in pursuit of this goal.

From here I want to engage and push at the conclusion in recent scholarship that to be a teacher activist educators must act as political change agents in a visible and acknowledged way outside of the classroom. Picower (2012a) and Montaño et al (2002) concluded that activism should be moved outside the classroom where teachers are actively involved in social movements. This desired standard of educator action is vague and potentially troubling for educators in spaces where teachers cannot move from practicing "liberatory classrooms" during the day to a collective of teacher activists at night. At times the demand of a political consciousness is exclusionary in the sense that there seems to be only one correct type of political consciousness. In a sense, I wonder if the academy as a body, with the power to create categories and reinforce or disrupt discoursive influences on women educators, can engage in the same level of reflection, messy and contradictory, as shown by the participants of this study. Regardless, I hope that the conservative context of this research begs the question of whether commitments to change as represented by teacher activist scholarship actually enables a broader understanding and promotion of teacher engagement as educators of change.

Finally, I conclude with a question. In my field, Curriculum Studies, we center our focus on the question, what knowledge is of the most worth? I feel that through exploring women's experiences and by keeping their voices intact throughout this work, I have attempted to gain a foothold in that area. Yet, there is another question that is woven into the fabric of this work and it was best posed by Jasmine. She questions whether moving from community activism to being a counselor at her at-risk alma mater could still be considered activism. Her indecision and fear that

her actions would be negated by history plague her. Her question, I believe, is one that as a society that we are still trying to answer and that is, what is the worth of a woman educator's labor?

Future Research

The women participants overwhelmed me with their passion for their work and their subsequent heartbreak. The personal struggles and the tolls of their actions as agents of change is implied in the constructed narratives of this work. However, the personal tolls on their personal and professional lives warrants a more focused study and provides immediate direction for future research. That research could easily come about through asking "How has being an agent of change impacted your life?" Additionally, more narratives should be collected from other conservative spaces in an attempt to further retheorize education's approach to teacher activism. In light of the heightened political atmosphere in which this dissertation was written, this work also serves as a warning as well as a potential avenue of study. Application or ignorance of liberal or conservative ideologies role in curriculum and teacher education counteracts the best practices in education. Broad philosophic application of good and bad, educated or ignorant does little to further our understanding of promoting democratic education. Additionally, further study of white identities, political ideologies, and social class in education is also required to aid the development of future and current educators.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Monday, March 13, 2017
IRB Application No	ED1714
Proposal Title:	Red Dirt Resistance: Oklahoman Urban Educators as Agents of Change
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/12/2020

Principal Investigator(s):

Lisa Lynn
, OK 74075

Jennifer Job
254 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☐ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire to Participate in Red Dirt Resistance Study

1. Do you work and/or live in the Oklahoma City area?
2. What is your current employment?
3. Do you consider yourself someone who takes action or makes a regular effort to bring about social change?
4. Do you contribute to school or community efforts to create equal education opportunities or democratic education?
5. Do you feel strongly about having equal educational opportunities for the children of Oklahoma City?
6. What issues do you think affects the educational opportunities of the children in Oklahoma City?
7. What information about your race, ethnicity, or religious orientation would you feel comfortable sharing with me?

APPENDIX C

Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you came to be an educator.
    a. Work history
    b. Like and dislike about the role
    c. Dreams for the role

2. Tell me about what it means to you to be an “agent of social change”
    a. Explain ways you identify with that and, if necessary, ways that you don’t identify with that.

3. Explain obstacles you have had to overcome to enact social change.
    a. What were your hardest days?
    b. What were your greatest victories?

VITA

LISA LYNN

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: RED DIRT RESISTANCE: OKLAHOMA EDUCATORS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Major Field: Education, with an option in Curriculum Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education, with an option in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Applied Behavioral Studies, with an option in Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2001.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in 1998.

Experience:

- Assisted the program evaluator of a million dollar HHMI STEM grant with the Integrated Biological Sciences department at OSU
- Instructor for various general education courses: Public Purposes of Education, Historical Foundations of American Education, Child Development, Intro into Gender and Women Studies
- Elementary Teacher, *August 2004- May 2015*

Professional Memberships:
AERA, Division B: Curriculum Studies